

Love me if you dare Chapter 1-20

Chapter 1

The blue clouds covered the mountains from a distance while a thin layer of snow could be seen on the forest trail. The air felt cold and refreshing, smelling of pine and snow. It was a nice and comfortable scent, making it ideal for a slow walk.

Alighting from the bus, Jian Yao looked around until she spotted a stone path. Following the path for 10 minutes, Jian Yao saw the grey-ish green roof of a European styled cottage. Ever since she could remember things, she had always seen this cottage at the outskirts of the hillside.

Despite the fact that twenty years had passed, this cottage didn't feel outdated at all even when compared to the modern infrastructure nowadays. This cottage had been left unoccupied for the past few years and there were even rumours that it was a haunted house.

Jian Yao had believed it when she was younger, since the house was always sitting alone amidst the darkness at the outskirts of the hillside. It was only when she got older then she learnt the truth. It turned out the truth was just that the owner of the house had went overseas with his son when his wife passed away.

However, the house that stood in front of Jian Yao now was different from her memory. This cottage was given a fresh coat of paint and she could see the lights shining from inside, the weeds surrounding the cottage was also pulled out.

Jian Yao was a fourth year student majoring in English. The reason she was here today was because her middle school teacher had introduced a part time translator job to her after knowing that she was on holiday. Although the pay was rather good, her teacher had mentioned that this employer was very picky. This employer had rejected all of the previous applicants that her teacher had referred.

Removing her gloves, Jian Yao knocked on the front door. A man who looked to be in his twenties, wearing a thin sweater with black trousers, greeted her. He was tall, thin and had delicate features.

“Jian Yao?” He asked, giving her a cheeky smile.

Jian Yao’s cheeks were red, possibly from the coldness. Her breath came out in white mist and her eyes were slightly wet. “Yes, I am Jian Yao. Nice to meet you.”

“Come in,” the man stepped aside to let Jian Yao entered.

Layers of dark purple curtains lined the window, there were large velvet couches with curved backrest. At the corner of the house, Jian Yao saw a fireplace with logs in it. This felt very much like a typical European styled cottage. At the side of the house, a deep brown wooden staircase led up to the second floor which was really quiet as though there wasn’t anyone there.

The only thing that felt out of place in this cottage was the metal railings that were fitted on the windows, not allowing much sunrays to come into the house. With his sleeves rolled up, the man washed his hands before handing a cup of tea to Jian Yao and gestured for her to sit down. When he sat down opposite her, Jian Yao caught a very faint but familiar scent from him. A scent which Jian Yao couldn’t quite remember where she had smell it before.

The man gave Jian Yao a friendly smile, “I am Fu Zi Yu and the owner of this place is called Bao Jin Yan. We are currently looking for a translator to translate his English documents into Chinese.”

Jian Yao nodded, wondering if the owner was related to the previous owner of the house or maybe he was a new owner.

Zi Yu took out a stack of papers and a pen, handing it over to Jian Yao. “So, let’s not waste any more time and start the test to see if you are qualified for this job. Within half an hour, please translate all the English articles here.”

Jian Yao flipped through the articles before looking up, "Is there a computer here?"

Zi Yu shook his head and a helpless smile appeared on his face. "Jin Yan likes things to be handwritten."

"No problem," Jian Yao picked up the pen and papers and started to work her way through the articles. Zi Yu got up quietly and headed to the sink to wash his hands again before leaning against one of the windows, sipping his tea quietly.

"The victim had been sexually assaulted and there were signs that the victim's hands had been tied together. There were also multiple wounds on her lower body – " Jian Yao was a bit surprised by the content and paused in her translation. She looked up at Zi Yu who was impervious.

As Jian Yao had experience in translating such things in the past – except that it was not as gruesome as this, she got over her surprise rather swiftly. She got back to translating the article until she came across a word that she did not know. Briefly looking through the whole article, Jian Yao encountered quite a number of words that were rather uncommon. "Do you have a dictionary specialised in this field of work?"

Zi Yu pointed to the bookshelf at the side, "Feel free to use any one of them."

Jian Yao managed to find what she was looking for and she buried herself in translating the article again.

"Sexhanges – , Parentiside –" It was not a surprise that she did not know such words as she continued looking through the dictionaries.

After she managed to translate everything, Jian Yao checked it thoroughly once more. Zi Yu looked at his watch and was rather surprised when he saw that only 25 minutes had passed since the start of the test. "I will be back in a bit after I hand this over to Jin Yan."

After saying that, Zi Yu headed up to the second floor. Jian Yao simply sat the couch and waited for Zi Yu. He was back in a short while and he went to the sink to wash his hands once more before drying it on his handkerchief. "He is looking through it now."

"Okay," Jian Yao nodded.

With nothing much to do, Zi Yu started to strike up a conversation with Jian Yao. "Are you studying at a University in B City?"

"Yes, I am graduating next year." Jian Yao answered.

Zi Yu inclined his head slightly, "I see. We have been talking for quite a while, do you want to guess which profession I am in?"

The man in front of Jian Yao looked to be older than her by a few years and he was a very courteous person. Jian Yao had a good first impression of him. "Are you a doctor?"

Zi Yu's smile got deeper, "How did you know?"

Jian Yao was rather pleased that she managed to guess correctly, her gaze landed on Zi Yu's slender fingers. "It was just a lucky guess, since I saw you washing your hands a number of times which means that you are a person who placed great emphasize on cleanliness. I also smell a very faint disinfectant scent coming from you and your fingers... It looked rather doctor-ish."

"I guess I will take those as compliments then," Zi Yu replied. They continued chatting about other things when the conversation somehow steered back to Bao Jin Yan. At the mention of him, Zi Yu sighed. "I am leaving here in a few days, but I am worried about Jin Yan. To be honest, he is a fairly withdrawn person."

Listening to him talking about Jin Yan, Jian Yao simply gave him a polite smile with no questions asked.

Zi Yu sneaked a glance at her before continuing, "Even though he has been back for quite a while, he still didn't have any friends. I bet you don't even know when he got back here."

Jian Yao's smile remains unchanged, looking as though she had no intention of continuing the topic. However, she saw Zi Yu looking at her intently as if he was waiting for her answer. Although Jian Yao felt quite weird, she replied him nonetheless. "He came back last year, right?"

"How did you know?" Zi Yu asked.

"I passed by here last year during my holidays and I didn't see any creeper. But when I entered the house just now, I saw that the creeper was about four to five meters tall. My house's creeper grow about that much in a year."

Unexpectedly, they had chatted with each other for half an hour. Zi Yu looked at his watch with a smile on his face. "It is rather late now, why don't you head home first? I will call you later when we come to a decision."

Jian Yao nodded.

"Thank you for coming today, if he decided to hire you, there will be a contract drawn up. You will be required to work here for twenty days straight and all translation works had to be done on the spot. Also all the information have to remain confidential, so you can't bring home any of it." Zi Yu informed her as he walked her to the door. "Jin Yan is currently recuperating so without any permission, you are not allowed to head up to the second floor. Regarding other details, we will discuss it when we sign the contract."

When Jian Yao left the house, it was close to evening time.

The sun was setting, bathing the area in an orange glow. It had looked especially pretty when the rays landed on the crystal white snow and the leaves that were covered in snow.

Jian Yao was pretty confident about getting hired. Despite the fact that the employer hadn't showed his face once, making him rather mysterious and a little eccentric.

But at the end of it, this job was referred to her by her teacher so it should be reliable.

After walking a few meters away from the house, Jian Yao turned back to look at the house once more.

From the window on the second floor, she spotted a tall and slender man, wearing a black cut suit. A rather striking sight if you asked Jian Yao. However, she was too far away from the house to see the man's face clearly.

Once Jian Yao was gone, Zi Yu went up to the second floor straight.

Compared to the warm elegance on the first floor, the second floor was rather gloomy and cold. There were a number of sealed rooms and the walls were completely void of any decorations.

Going to the room at the end of the hallway, he saw that the door was left ajar.

He pushed it open and leaned against the door. There was none of the refined elegant man left as he cursed loudly.

It caused the man who was reading a book to frown momentarily at Zi Yu. However, at the next second, he resumed his reading.

Zi Yu was nonchalant as he picked up Jian Yao's translation work and handed it over to the man. "She has beautiful handwriting and translated perfectly."

Zi Yu took out a paper from his pocket and unfolded it. On the paper, there were a few questions like what was his occupation, how long has Jin Yan moved here and etc.

Yes, those were the questions that Zi Yu had asked Jian Yao to guess just now.

He slapped the piece of paper on the table and said, "Regarding all these questions here, she had managed to answer all of them correctly. Are you satisfied with her?"

The man's lips turned up ever so slightly.

Seeing that expression, Zi Yu was afraid that he was going to be picky again, he pulled out a chair and sat in front of him.

"If you are not satisfied with her, you can always translate it yourself. Besides, I am not your assistant and not to mention I will be returning to the city soon, so do not always count on me to help you run your errands."

The man looked up from his book with a weird expression on his face as he replied Zi Yu.

"My time isn't to be used doing those silly things."

For a moment, Zi Yu did not know how to reply him.

"You are a homicide expert and she is just a translator, I don't understand why there is a need to test her observation skills? I am willing to bet that she probably thinks that I talk too much."

This time, the man revealed a very gentle smile.

"Obviously, I cannot allowed stupid people to translate my work. If the person isn't meticulous enough, he will only be translating directly from the article. He won't be able to translate the finer details and most definitely he won't be able to grasp the true meanings behind those words."

Zi Yu really didn't know if he should laugh or be angry but he was all too used to him being like this. "So does this mean that Jian Yao is able to understand you?"

The man face went blank for a second. Then he went back to read his book and said, "No one will ever be able to understand."

Chapter 2

Jiao Yao lived alone in the old house at the police compound during the holidays. This was where Jian Yao's family lived before her father's death. When Jian Yao's mother remarried, they moved out and this house was left vacant.

It was already late evening, the lights in the compound were mostly lit up and the smell of food could be detected. Similarly, the lights in the police office was also lit up while the police busied themselves.

Jian Yao unlocked her house door only to see her sister, Jian Xuan, lying on the couch and munching an apple while watching the television.

When Jing Xuan saw that her sister was back, she turned around and complained a little, "Why are you home so late? I waited almost half a day for you."

Jian Yao tossed her bag at her sister and sat down beside her. "My interview ended late. Besides, I thought that you will be home late? Weren't you going to catch some sleep over at that place."

By 'that place, Jian Yao was referring to her stepfather's house. Both of them had spent quite a number of years there, resulting in a close relationship with their stepfather. However, her stepfather's house was rather cramped.

This was why Jian Yao chose to move out once she was of age. Jian Xuan spent her time alternating between the two places. But during festivals

like Chinese New Year and such, the whole family would usually gather together.

Jian Xuan was currently studying aboard at a university. It took her ten hours to get home which explained why she looked rather haggard. However, once she heard the word 'interview', she had sat up immediately, her eyes brimming with curiosity as she looked at her sister.

"So, I heard from mother that you went *there* for an interview?"

Jian Yao gave her a smile before replying, "I did go over there for an interview." She briefly recounted what happened during the interview without mentioning the content of her translation work due to confidentiality requirements of the job.

Jian Xuan's expression turned enigmatic, "So, you haven't seen that ... Mr Bao yet?"

"No." Jian Yao looked at her and asked, "Why?"

"Well," Jian Xuan suddenly patted her sister's shoulder and with a very dignified bitter tone said, "Sister, you must be prepared. I think I might have seen him before. He is simply too frightening."

Suddenly, an image of the man emerged in Jian Yao's mind. It was the image of the man which she had glimpsed on the second floor of her house. *He looks scary?*

Jian Xuan immediately described to Jian Yao what happened.

Last year, during the tomb sweeping festival, Jian Xuan had went back home. One time, when she and her friends went up the mountain to fish, she passed by the house and saw the man standing at the second floor.

During that time, Jian Yao was still working in the city and hence did not know what happened.

Although this happened a year ago, Jian Xuan could still clearly remembered what she saw.

She shivered a little, “He was all skin and bones, with sunken eyes and wrinkled skin – he resembled a skeleton. Actually, he looked more like a monster! Later on another occasion, my classmates saw him in the street wearing a mask covering his face – he most probably did not want to scare anyone with his horrifying look.”

After hearing that, Jian Yao remained silence.

“Just a piece of advice, if that person is really Mr Bao, do not ever look at his face.” Jian Xuan added after a while.

Jian Yao smiled and say, “It’s okay. Come what may, he will not be able to scare me.”

After chatting a while more, Jian Yao looked at the time before turning to look at the police office that was opposite her house. There were still lights emitting from the office.

“Let’s call Li Xun Ran to eat dinner with us,” Jian Yao said to her sister.

“I have to meet my friends,” Jian Xuan suddenly told her sister before leaving in a hurry.

Once her sister left, Jian Yao headed to the window and called Xun Ran.
“Xun Ran, it is me, Jian Yao. I am back.”

Xun Ran didn’t reply her immediately and that was when Jian Yao spotted a shadow appearing at the police office’s window.

“First stick your head out of the window, so I can verify your identity with my binoculars.” Xun Ran instructed her and Jian could hear a hint of laughter in his voice, making her smile slightly.

The Li's family and the Jian's family were very close friend, Xun Ran and Jian Yao had known each other since young. Because of their family's close relationship, the both of them had often hang out together even though there was a four years gap between the both of them.

After Xun Ran enrolled into the police academy, they hang out lesser. When Xun Ran finally graduated, it was Jian Yao's turn to head to the university and they had even lesser time to hang out with each other. Time passed and before she knows, 3 years had passed since Jian Yao last seen Xun Ran.

The sky was already dark, the street lamps slowly lighted up one by one until the end of the street. Under the dark and hazy sky, Xun Ran was in his police uniform, causally leaning against one of the lamppost and a lazy smile on his face.

Jian Yao walked over to him, a smile was on her face. Once she was in front of him, Xun Ran had hugged her before she could open her mouth to greet him.

"It has been a long time, Jian Yao." Xun Ran said to her.

Jian Yao was rather surprised by his sudden action but she returned the hug after a while as her smile grew wider.

They headed to one of the restaurants nearby, Xun Ran had chosen a table that was near the window. There was a screen that separated their table from the rest, secluded and quiet. While he was ordering food for them, Jian Yao simply looked at him quietly.

Not looking at her, Xun Ran continued pointing at the dishes he wanted to the waiter when he asked, "Why? There aren't handsome guys at your campus?"

"Indeed," Jian Yao answered him in all seriousness. A smile emerged when Xun Ran heard her answer.

Xun Ran's looks belonged to those upright kind of handsome, neat and clean. Black brows, red lips and white teeth, everyone who looked at him would agree that he was extremely good looking. However, Xun Ran was rather arrogant since young making it hard for people to approach him.

Jian Yao felt that aura was more evident now after he was in the force for these past few years. He was more solemn, more serious and more unapproachable.

After he had finished placing orders, he placed one of his arms on the back of the chair beside him. He was quiet for a few seconds, staring at Jian Yao when he smiled. "Let's go fishing a few days later?"

When they were younger, the both of them would often run around in the mountains. Their activities included fishing and digging vegetables from the field.

"Sure," Jian Yao placed her chin on her hands. "I joined the fishing association when I was in school. My skills now is much better than before, you better prepared yourself mentally."

Xun Ran laughed loudly when he heard her answer. After a while, he asked. "Managed to find a boyfriend yet?"

"No, you?"

"Haven't, too busy."

They were halfway through their meal when Xun Ran's phone rang. Picking up his phone, his expression turned solemn when he heard what the person on the line was saying. After he hang up his phone, he took his wallet out from his coat's pocket, "Something came up in the station, I have to go. You can take your time and eat slowly. Waiter, bill!"

"It is fine," Jian Yao took out her wallet as well.

When the waiter arrived at their table with the bill, Jian Yao was about to take out her money when Xun Ran had grabbed her hands. His grip was surprisingly strong, making Jian Yao unable to move her hands.

After the waiter had given him his change, Xun Ran suddenly recalled about one of the cases he was handling. Waving a hand at her, Jian Yao moved closer to him. "Recently, there is a human trafficking organization that is in the move over here, their targets are mainly teenagers. Even though you and your sister are too old to be called teenagers, both of you should also keep a lookout. This case is currently being investigated so it isn't made known to the public yet."

Jian Yao went blank for a moment when she heard Xun Ran's voice again. "I was the one who found out what happened when I was sorting through the different cases. I found out that city as well as the area around here, there is a total of nine people who went missing. This number is twice higher compared to the previous year."

"Then?" Jian Yao frowned.

"I went to do a more in-depth understanding. Out of the nine missing people, eight of them are teenagers and they went missing in the city. "He paused for a while before continuing. "According to the records as well as asking some of the other police from other department, I found out that there is indeed a human trafficking organization in the area. Those missing people are mostly likely sold."

Jian Yao's frown got even deeper after listening to what he said. Xun Ran had patted her on her shoulders, "I will crack this case."

Jian Yao sent him to the entrance of the restaurant. Xun Ran had walked off when he stopped and turned back. He saw that Jian Yao was rooted to the same spot, looking at him. At this timing, the sky had already

turned dark. The light from the moon as well as the street lamps' light had woven together, illuminating the streets.

Jian Yao was dressed in a pale yellow sweater coupled with a pair of dark jeans, her long black hair draped off her shoulders, making her looked even more fairer than usual.

"Go in!" Xun Ran shouted and saw Jian Yao nodded. Turning his back on her, Xun Ran rubbed his hands together, blowing some air on them to warm his hands up as he walked towards the station.

At night, Jian Yao relayed what she heard from Xun Ran to her sister. Jian Xuan had appeared to be nervous and had even made plans to buy some self-defense tools to protect herself.

They had chatted a while more before heading to sleep when Jian Yao recalled whenever there is a case, the station would usually be extremely busy with no notion of the time outside. This meant that the fishing plan with Xun Ran had to be pushed back infinitely. She then suddenly thought of the interview, her priority now was that job.

The second day, Jian Yao was still in the kitchen, preparing breakfast when the doorbell rang. Opening the door, Jian Xuan saw a courier who handed her what appeared to be documents. Taking it from the courier, Jian Xuan passed it to Jian Yao. "Same city from us."

Opening it, true enough, it was the contract that Zi Yu had told her about. Looking through the contract once more to make sure that she didn't miss anything out, Jian Yao flipped to the last page of the contract when she stilled.

The other party had already signed his name, 'Bao Jin Yan'.

Curious, Jian Xuan looked over her sister's shoulders. "The monster send this? His handwriting is – "

“His handwriting style is just like him,” Jian Yao told her sister. “Even if he is a monster, he is a monster with character.”

“Oh,” Jian Xuan didn’t say anything more.

Jian Yao took out a pen from her bag and was about to sign her name when she stopped. Taking a piece of paper, she practiced signing her name on the paper for over ten times. It was only then when she finally picked up the pen again, signing her name beside his.

Chapter 3

T City is located somewhere near the edge of a tributary of the Yangtze River. It is surrounded by mountains blocking the traffic which in turn caused the city to be a very backwater place. However, when the highway was built in T City 2 years ago, the city suddenly have a tremendous development and become the economic centre of the province. Like other developed cities, people in T City want to get out to go North Guangzhou, while the surrounding people living near T City wanted to get in.

During the period when Jian Yao was in university, she went back home every year. Each time she went back to her hometown, she felt like the history of the place was slowly fading away. Old building were slowly being demolished, real estate prices kept going up and the city felt more and more crowded. However, there were still things left untouched. For example, the rivers around the city, the People’s Heroes Monument as well as *that* old and secluded villa.

At eight in the morning, she reached just on time and knocked on the door which turned out to be already open. Peeking in, she saw that the house was entirely silent with only the sunlight streaming in, there wasn’t anyone in the house.

Yesterday, Fan Zi Yu called to inform her that he needed to go back to B City. He told her to make herself at home in the villa, with the exception of the locked room on the first floor. It seems that this is the start of “make herself at home”.

The living room looks the same except for the white colored square table and chair near the window. There was a laptop on top of the table with a pile of old yellow document. According to the agreement, due to the large workload, it is requested for her to make use of the laptop.

Jian Yao sat down on the white chair.

Sitting down on the white chair, Jian Yao turned to look outside of the window. There were mountains that were blanketed snow, she could also see the sunlight streaming through the pine trees, all of these made a beautiful sight.

Looking at the table, everything was neatly arranged – this made a good and comfortable environment to work in. Switching the laptop on, she saw that a word document was already opened. But there was no content in it except for the email address at the top of the page.

Getting up, Jian Yao decided to do a little exploring.

The kitchen is next to the living room and Jian Yao could smell pyrotechnic gas in the air which could mean Mr Bo usually cook at home. Placing the fruits she bought into the fridge, she saw that it was almost empty saved for the half eaten fish soup.

Close by the kitchen, there was a door which was connected to a hallway. Taking a few steps, Jian Yao discovered a fishing rod placed against the wall. It wasn't a surprise since this place had a few water bodies and fishes could often be seen swimming in the water so most of the families here had one or two fishing rods at home.

What surprised Jian Yao was the brand of the fishing rod, “Red Tiger.” Not to mention that it was a limited edition and probably considered to

be one of the most expensive in the world. This version of fishing rod was hailed as the best in many anglers' mind.

Taking out her phone after a minute of admiring it, Jian Yao took a picture before she continued walking. Nearing the end of the hallway, Jian Yao halted her steps. In front of her was a rather dark small room. Heavy curtains were used to block out the sunlight, this room felt dull and cold. There wasn't anything else in the room except for two tightly closed door.

Going into the room, Jian Yao headed to one of the doors and tried to pull it open only to realise that it was locked. She then made her way back to the living room since she had enough of exploring for now.

Making a cup of coffee for herself, she started working.

Time passed rather quickly and Jian Yao never once stood up from her work station. While she was hard at work, Fu Zi Yu was in one of the rooms on the second floor, facing surveillance screens. His eyes were captured by the sight of Jian Yao before he turned to Bao Jin Yan. "She is rather well-behaved. I guess there won't be any problems so I will be going back to the city tomorrow."

Leaning against the couch with his long legs resting on the footstool, Bao Jin Yan's sleeves were rolled up halfway as he picked up another grilled fish in his mouth. His eyes flicked up to the screen for a second before looking away. "Boring, she is just like a wooden doll."

"Well, you did pick her yourself." A smile was Fu Zi Yu's face as he reminded him. Turning to the man on the couch, he saw that the plate was completely empty. It was just minutes ago when it was filled with fishes. "Will you die if you don't eat fish for a day?"

Licking his fingers slowly, Bao Jin Yan's lips curved up slowly. "No but I will turn violent if my needs aren't met."

After that dinner with Jian Yao, Lee Xun Ran started to get increasingly busy. He was busy enough with his usual work and added onto that was the missing teenagers' case. As the investigation continued, it started to get harder to dig deeper. The first stumbling block was the missing teenagers all came from different areas and the second stumbling block was the time that they went missing were all different as well.

Lee Xun Ran couldn't find any link that these missing teenagers' cases were related and they were abducted by an organisation, he had no way to prove that this organisation exist. His supervisor did pay attention to his findings but without concrete evidence, this case couldn't get the green light to start a formal investigation nor an increase in manpower.

This was why he decided to meet up with one of his seniors for dinner. Both of them went to a nearby hotpot restaurant which was the perfect meal on such a chilly day.

"Honestly, you have too much free time on your hand." His senior told him after Lee Xun Ran told him what he was investigating.

Lee Xun Ran gave him a smile. Well, he did have a little more time on his hand but now that he was involved, he wasn't going to just give up so easily. He lit a cigarette and took a puff of it. "I trust my instinct. My sixth sense is telling me that these few cases are connected and they are done by the same person. Other people wash their hands off it but I can't. I can't let more children disappear again."

"It is not going to be easy," his senior said after a while. "Our country is so big, how are you planning to start? The organisation is smart enough to not leave any traces behind."

"But you have to understand that – "

"There is two ways to crack this case. First, you find an expert. This kind of case isn't something that normal people like us can solve. But nowadays, finding an expert isn't that easy. All of them are just all talk with their deduction but no actions were taken. So this brings us to the

second way, you can choose to work undercover but unlike the past, trafficking organisation isn't going to be as easy to infiltrate. One of the cops in the past managed to infiltrate but that was after days and days of disguising himself as a beggar. He eventually cracked the case but he died soon after. "

Lee Xun Ran didn't say anything as he drowned another can of beer. His senior sighed before changing the topic, he had no doubt that Lee Xun Ran was going to continue with his investigation. "I saw a woman with you the other day, is it Jian Yao? She has grown up rather well, getting prettier day by day. It isn't easy to find a suitable partner in our line of work so you better treat her well and propose soon."

"What propose? She is just my sister." Lee Xun Ran said.

As per usual, just like every other day, Jian Yao will send her completed work to the email address in the laptop during afternoon time. The next day, she will get a read receipt but still, Bao Jin Yan never once replied her email nor showed his face.

Well, she believed that no news meant good news.

However, now that she had seen Bao Jin Yan's fishing rod, her fishing addiction started to kick in. It has been quite a while since she last fished. After working continuously for a week, she picked a day with the perfect weather to take a break.

"Hello?" Lee Xun Ran answered his phone. He was currently in disguise, wearing tattered clothing to make himself resembled a beggar. After talking to his senior, he choose to do what that cop had done. It had been a few days but still, there wasn't anything. "Fishing? I am currently in the midst of an investigation."

"Is that so?" Jian Yao asked.

"How about this? I will meet you later on at our secret spot but I can't give you an exact timing now." Lee Xun Ran hung up after he told her

that. Looking at her phone, Jian Yao placed it on the table before packing her fishing gears.

She was surprised that Lee Xun Ran still remembered their secret spot. They discovered that spot when they were still kids. The place is rather remote so not many people know about it and that was probably why the fishes are always bountiful in that area.

Since then, Lee Xun Ran coined that place to be their secret spot.

Another reason why such a good place weren't discovered earlier by other people might have to do with the fact that it is located near Bao Jin Yan's house which was rumored to be haunted and making people stayed away from it. Now that she think about it, she realized that she could see this spot clearly from Bao Jin Yan's living room so their secret spot weren't exactly a secret anymore.

Well, that aspect might have changed but the memories that remained were worth reminiscing about.

Jian Yao set out after lunch when it was the warmest hour of the day, not too hot and not too cold either. The sunlight filtered through, shinning on the small path that crossed the villa, leading further into the forest. Between the black and the brown stones, hidden was a small trail of sparkling water. The water continued to flow, connecting to an even bigger water body.

This is the secret place.

It was relatively quiet with no one around. Jian Yao headed to the largest tree to sit before she started to fish. It was only then when she saw that the opposite tree had a fishing rod underneath but there wasn't anyone tending to it.

Her phone rang and she saw that it was Lee Xun Ran. "Urgent situation, I won't be able to go."

“But I am already here!” Jian Yao told him.

“You can fish by yourself then. But remember to take care of yourself and call me if you encounter trouble. Gotta to go now.”

Jian Yao sighed softly, “Bye.”

Hanging up, Jian Yao sat for a little while before heading to the fishing rod that wasn’t tended by anyone. It was a little unexpected but at the same time, she kind of expected it. This was the same fishing rod that she saw before.

Her excitement started to grow as she looked around the place. But still, she didn’t see any traces of a person being here. Just as she was about to walk off, she heard the sound of a bell being rang rapidly signaling a fish had bit the bait.

Reeling the carp up, she placed it into the basket. Seeing the empty hook, Jian Yao hesitated for a while before looking down to find something. As expected, she found a box of baits. Hooking one of the baits on to the hook, she placed the fishing rod back to its original position.

Perhaps, a branded fishing rod really makes all the difference and coupled with the nice and cozy weather, the fishes were more enthusiastic than usual. Before she could return to her spot, another fish had bit the bait again.

Within half an hour, Jian Yao had caught six fishes. But there was still no sight of Mr. Bao. Even if he was called away by an urgent matter, simply leaving such an expensive fishing rod around was unthinkable.

Luckily, she was the one who saw the rod.

Eventually, Jian Yao moved her equipment over and she even hooked her own specially created bait onto his fishing rod. A branded fishing rod coupled with a high quality bait is a flawless combination. When the skies started to darken, Jian Yao had caught enough fishes to fill up two baskets.

She exerted more than her usual strength to carry the two baskets back to the villa. Jian Yao even helped to place the fishing rod back to where she had seen it in the house. After a while of thinking, she decided to email her employer.

“Mr. Bao, I saw your fishing rod when I happened to go fishing just now. I am unsure if you were called away by an urgent matter so I took the liberty to help you pack your equipment and brought it back to the house. I’ve also brought back the fishes that were caught by your fishing rod. If this offend you in any way, I seek your forgiveness.”

After sending the email, Jian Yao selected a few fishes that she caught to bring home. It was during dinner time when her phone signaled that she had just received a new email. Opening it up, she saw that it was a reply from Mr. Bao; the first ever reply.

“The fishes are good. Thank you.”

— — — —

Turning up at the villa the next day, there was still no one. Not putting much thought about yesterday, Jian Yao started to bury herself in her work.

During a short break, she went to wash some of the fruits she brought. Entering the kitchen, she sniffed a waft of fish being cooked, needless to say, it smelt delicious. Opening the fridge, she was momentarily shocked – there were so many fishes in the fridge.

Unlike yesterday where it was completely empty, the fridge was filled to brim today. There were all kind of fishes that were cooked in a variety of methods; braised fish, steamed fish, pickled fish head, fish slices and fish soup – the fridge was filled to the brim with these dishes and all of it looked to be leftover.

Closing the fridge, Jian Yao suddenly felt like laughing as she imagined her employer who cooked all of these in the middle of the night.

This Mr. Bao must have liked to eat fish a lot.

— — —

Each day continued to pass just like per usual after that when it was yet another day with nice weather. Jian Yao went to the secret spot with her sister this time. Jian Yao didn't want to disturb Lee Xun Ran at work plus his phone was off completely this time, making it felt as though he had disappeared without a trace.

Upon reaching, she saw that familiar rod once again. Jian Xuan saw the brand of the fishing rod before exclaiming. "Whose fishing rod is this? How can the person leave such an expensive rod lying around."

Jian Yao's curiosity started to grow too – why did Mr. Bao leave his fishing rod here without anyone tending it?

Jian Xuan lifted the fishing rod out of the water. "Hey, there is no bait. Did one of the fish bite the bait? If that is the case then where is the fish? This kind of hook isn't easy for the fish to get away."

Hearing what Jian Xuan had said, Jian Yao looked around for a box of baits but there wasn't anything save for this fishing rod.

Jian Xuan had also discovered the same thing, "Is this person another **Jiang Tai Gong?*"

Jian Yao understood by now as the end of her lips curved up slightly, "No, he isn't waiting for fish."

He is waiting for her.

**jiang tai gong: "Taigong Diaoyu, Yuanzhe Shanggou" is a famous Chinese idiom about a willing victim letting himself be caught.*

Chapter 4

Jian Yao appears to be a gentle girl, with all the qualities one would ask for in pretty girl -long hair, fair complexion, nice facial features and sparkly eyes. She is also very slim.

The dress she is wearing is elegant and tasteful. With her proportions, she will look good in whatever she chooses to wear. She speaks with a soft and pleasant voice.

She inherited her mother's virtuous temperament - modest and elegant. But she also has her father's free and easy going spirit. Though her father was only able to accompany her for six years, Jian Yao remembers a lot of his teachings, such as "A real man with live with integrity and a clear conscience always, and "Enjoy and maximize all the pleasures which life affords!" etc etc

As the sun begins to set, she starts to pack up. She leaves the "DAIA Red Tiger" and more than a dozen fish on the shore. As they start to walk, Jian Xuan is amazed: "Are we just going to leave them here?"

"Yeah. He will come over and collect them later."

When they reach their house, Jian Xuan asks: "Sister, you helped him to catch so many fish, did he not even send you an email to say thank you??" Jian Xuan not usually so preoccupied with other's lack of gratitude, but she fears her sister's generosity will be taken advantage of.

Jian Yao admits she has not thought about it. To her, Bo Jinyan seems to be a pretty straightforward guy. She smiles: "What do you mean?"

Jian Xuan says: "I think you are too nice to the weirdo. Are you interested in him?"

Jian Yao laughs: "Nonsense."

-

After three days, to her surprise, a parcel arrives - a gift from Mr. Bo.

Walking into the house, she sees a large box on the table. Jian Xuan looks at her. Obviously, she's waiting for Jian Yao to reveal what's inside.

"From B City. Fu Zi Yu (Fu Ziyu) sent it to you." Jian Xuan asks curiously, "Isn't he the gay partner of the weirdo? What is he sending to you?"

Fu Ziyu didn't mention anything about a parcel. Jian Yao has no idea what it is. To her surprise, it's a brand new fishing rod, a "DAIA" Red Tiger! The exact same one as Bo Jinyan

Jian Yao gives Fu Ziyu a call.

In another city, Fu Ziyu, dresses in a white doctor's robe, sits in the office and is looking at his patients' files.

"Jian Yao, please accept this as a token of appreciation from Jinyan. He asked me to send it to you on his behalf. You know how much he likes to eat fish. It's nothing, really"

Jian Yao hesitates: "It is too expensive, I cannot accept this."

Fu Ziyu smiles: "He has one already. And I don't fish. This rod will be wasted if you don't accept it. "

Jian Yao disagrees: "Mr. Fu, this 'reward' is much bigger than my 'sacrifice'. It's only a few fish! "

"It is Jinyan's idea, you will have to talk to him about this. I can't make any decisions." Fu Ziyu interrupts her, "but knowing his character, useless stuff gets thrown out. Tomorrow, you will see a pitiful 'Red Tiger' inside the garage bin by the back door."

Jian Yao has no choice but to say she will accept it. But she doesn't want the money from doing the translation. Since she is so adamant about it, Fu Ziyu agrees to it with some reluctance.

-

After the phone conversation, Fu Ziyu recalls the events two days ago. He did not lie to Jian Yao, buying the Red Tiger is Bo Jinyan's decision, but giving a present is his idea.

Two days ago, he called Bo Jinyan like he normally does just to check that everything is going smoothly. Casually, he asked: "Do I need to replenish your fish supply??" With winter approaching, a small town like the one Bo Jinyan is staying might prove difficult to buy fresh fish.

Surprisingly Bo Jinyan replied: "I have a lot of fish."

"How? Where?" He knows Bo Jinyan too well. He is not patient enough to stand for hours fishing himself. Usually, he will cast the fishing rod, then walk off within minutes because he is so bored.

Bo Jinyan replied in a calm voice: "Jian Yao caught them for me."

Fu Ziyu was intrigued: "Why did she catch fish for you?"

Bo Jinyan answered: "I don't know and I don't care."

Fu Ziyu was speechless - a typical "Bo Jinyan-style answer." He said: "And you previously commented that she is like a piece of wood....How are you going to thank her?"

Bo Jinyan thought for a moment: "I'll double her pay."

Fu Ziyu was about to say yes when a thought came to his mind. With Bo Jinyan's personality, it's extremely hard for him to make friends, but

maybe, just maybe, the two of them will get along. So Fu Ziyu said: "Nah, cash is a bad idea. You should send her a gift."

"Alright. Please arrange on my behalf."

"Hey, Jinyan, I'm not your maid!" Fu Ziyu growled, "I do not know her well enough. How would I know what's a good gift for her?"

Bo Jinyan thought for a few moments, then smiled and told him: "Get her a fishing rod that is exactly the same as mine. This way, I don't even have to set up my fishing rod by the river in the morning and collect it at night."

-

The next day after receiving the rod, Jian Yao takes a bottle of wine with her to the villa.

Jian Yao's father used to have a wine cellar. There's still a few bottles left after all these years although the stock is being steadily depleted by Lee, who drinks them when he visits the family. The wine is from local artisan winery. It's eight years old and you won't be able to buy anything like this in a shop, so it is very precious. An appropriate way of saying thank you for the expensive 'Red Tiger'.

Leaving the bottle of wine in the kitchen, Jian Yao send an email to Bo Jinyan: "A good wine for fish.. Please accept my gift."

Bo Jinyan did not reply. But the next day when Jian Yao goes to the villa, she notices the wine is placed in the cupboard, but there's less of it in the bottle.

-

Days passed, the New Year is just around the corner, and Jian Yao's translation work is near its completion.

Jian Xuan feels a deep regret in her: "You still haven't seen the man's face? Not even once?" At least she is not calling him a weirdo anymore.

To be frank, Jian Yao is a little disappointed too. But what she doesn't expect is that it's the very next day after their conversation that they will finally see each other face to face for the first time.

It's a bright sunny morning. It's warmer than usual for this time of the year. Jian Yao leaves home wearing a thin padded jacket. As usual, she heads to the villa and begins her work.

Trying to finish off all the translation before the New Year, Jian Yao stayed in the villa for a bit longer than usual. As she is about to leave, she realised the weather has turned - thunder, lightning, and heavy rain.

It's too dangerous to travel now. Jian Yao waits for the wind and the rain to die down, but the weather shows no signs of improvement in the next few hours. She gives up and calls the family. But no one answers.

-

Night is here. The wind is still howling outside the villa. The noisy chaos outside is a sharp contrast to the still and silence inside the villa.

The power supply for small towns are less reliable and bad weather often cause blackouts. Jian Yao hears some 'pops' in the air and thinks to herself: Please, not another power outage.

Suddenly, all the lights were gone, and darkness fills the room. Jian Yao gives a sigh and start to walk towards the stairs. She shouts out from the bottom of the stairs. "Mr Bo! Mr Bo!"

He did not respond.

Jian Yao climbs the stairs, and finds there's a gate. An iron gate. A dark large iron gate, blocking the entrance on the second floor. It looks gloomy and forbidding.

Jian Yao is taken back slightly. Then she walks up and knocks on the iron gate, shouting a few words.

No one.

There is a small window on the iron gate. Jian Yao takes a peep through the small window and sees a dark hallway, with several doors, closed of course. A bolt of lightning tore across the sky and a peal of thunder followed. It's a scene that one often finds in horror movies.

Jian Yao has been to the villa many times, but this is the first time she feels afraid. She turns back. Just as she's about to walk down the stairs, a door opens, and she hears footsteps behind her.

Jian Yao holds on to the stair railings tightly. She dares not to move.

On a torrential rainy night, a man walks toward the gates. Sudden there's a "bang" sound. The iron gate is opened. A tall man comes out.

Because it's too dark to see what this man looks like. He is very tall, at least 185cm. Surprisingly quite a burly man, not as thin as Jian Yao had imagined him to be. He is wearing a white bathrobe? No wonder nobody answered her when she yelled earlier.

See that it's a real person and not a ghost, Jian Yao felt less scared. Having had some experience with his eccentric personality, she is not too surprised to see him appearing the way he did.

He stops for a moment and looks at her. Then he walks down those stairs with his long legs.

Jian Yao: "Mr.. Bo?"

"Ah." He answered quietly, more like a hum from the nose.

Then he walks up to her. His big tall body is as a wall moving closer towards her. Jian Yao subconsciously steps back. In a polite voice, she asked: "Mr.Bo, do you have a flashlight ?"

Bo Jinyan walks straight pass her as if she isn't there. She follows behind him.

Bo Jinyan passes through the living room into the kitchen. Jian Yao speaks again: "Mr. Bo?"

"No." He replies without looking back. Although the response is brief, Jian Yao can tell that he has a deep and melodious voice.

"Do you know how to fix the problem?" Jian Yao asks tentatively. Although she does not know much about power, she is familiar with the fact that properties in remote locations such as this villa usually have its own power generator.

This time, Bo Jinyan turns around to look at her. After a few moment in deep thoughts, he replies: "Judging from the extend of the power outage, the transformer is overloaded. I will need to close the gates, open the transformer, find the damaged parts, then get the required accessories to repair it . "

He said in his deep male voice. Deep and clear, like the bass notes of a piano.

But just as Jian Yao has her hopes up, he speaks again. "But I will not fix it, I am busy. Make yourself at home, but do not disturb me. Goodbye. "

Then he turns around, through the kitchen, into the narrow aisle, and disappears into the darkness once again.

Down the aisle, is the locked room that is out of bounds to her.

Jian Yao stands, shocked at his reception. She totally does not expect their first face to face encounter will be like this.

She is working for him. There's a storm outside, a power crisis inside. And he wants nothing to do with her and leaves her by herself in the living room?

Chapter 5

Jian Yao sits down on the sofa. She decides to take a nap.

It doesn't take long for her to stand up again. She is wearing a thin jacket and her hands and feet are getting cold. I might catch a flu. She thought to herself.

She makes her way to the room where Bo Jinyan is in. At the end of the corridor, she gets another surprise.

Light.

A narrow streak of light shines through the gap at the bottom of the door. There is emergency lighting equipment!

Jian Yao stand there, stunned for a moment. She knocks on the door.

The door opens. Fluorescent tubes in the ceiling shines brightly. She finds it hard to adjust to the brightness after being in the darkness for so long.

Then she sees a man, blocking most of the light as he stand in front of the doorway.

Jian Yao blinks. She is curious what else is inside the room. But Bo Jinyan quickly stands in front of her to block her view.

“What’s up?” says the man wearing a huge white surgical mask. All Jian Yao can see is his eyes.

“I am cold, I need to borrow some clothes.” says Jian Yao

After a few moments of silence, he replies :” I don’t like other people wearing my clothes.”

Jian Yao is dumbfounded.

Then he steps back and closes the door.

Darkness surrounds her once again.

While he was closing the door, she noticed Bo Jinyan was wearing surgical gloves. She also saw some round containers sitting on the shelves inside the room. She is not sure what’s in them, but they had something in them.

— — —

Jian Yao goes back to the lounge. She sits down for a few minutes, and then she stands up once again. This time, heading toward the kitchen.

She lights up the gas stove top. Jian Yao places her hands close to the yellowish green flame to warm herself up. She looks up and sees a cupboard. The bottle of wine she gifted to Bo Jinyan is sitting on one of the shelves. Without hesitation, she opens the bottle and takes a few sips.

Now that she feels a little warmer, she realises that she is also quite hungry. She begins searching for food in the kitchen.

Empty. There's nothing in the cabinets. Not even a piece of fruit or biscuit. She looks inside the freezer. Again, it's empty. She turns to the fridge next. Bingo!

Fish. Lots of fish. Neatly stacked inside the refrigerator. She chooses the biggest one and puts it on the chopping board.

Using the light from her mobile phone, she makes herself a plate of poached fish fillet pieces. It is still pretty dark in the kitchen, but it's enough for her to prepare the food.

Satisfied with what she has cooked, she places the plate on the dining table and heads back to the kitchen to clean up before she enjoys her meal.

After she is done, she returns to the dining room, only to find the table empty.

A tall white shadow stands on the other side of the table. A pair of hands is holding the plate of food.

"Thump" Bo Jinyan puts the plate back on the table.

"Unpalatable!" He says in his deep voice.

"The fish is boiled for too long. And you added too much salt."

Jian Yao feels as if a bomb has exploded within her. She walks over to him, takes the plate and brings it back to the other side of the table. "Did I say you can eat it?"

Then she sits down, picks up the chopsticks, and eats in silence.

Bo Jinyan gives no reply. He just stands there, like a quiet white tree. The wind is howling outside. But inside the house, it's a sharp contrast. Everything seems so still and quiet. The flickering flames from the gas stove are the only movement.

Suddenly, he walks over to her. She keeps her head facing down towards the table and pretends he is not there. In the corner of her eyes, she sees him leaving a man's jacket on the back of one of the dining chairs. His fingers are slender but plump, not skeletal as Jian Xuan has described.

Jian Yao is a little stunned. But she chooses not to comment.

Then he turns around, and walks into the kitchen.

— — —

He rolls up his sleeves. After washing his hands under the faucet, he stands before the chopping board and starts filleting more fish pieces.

He places the pieces of fish on the plate neatly, then one by one he puts them into the pot, and scoops them out quickly, like an experienced chef.

Soon he holds up another plate of poached fish, put it on the table pushes it in front of her.

"This is what poached fish should be like."

Jian Yao looks up at him.

All that work just to prove he can do a better job?

He is standing very close to her. Close enough for Jian Yao to see his face. He is not wearing a mask anymore. But he is wearing a pair of

chunky complicated looking glasses with bits of red beam showing on the sides. They are so big that most of his face is covered.

Night vision goggles?

His house has no hand held torches because he wears night vision goggles?

Even with the goggles on, Jian Yao can tell that he has attractive facial features. A slender and straight nose, thin lips and a nice jaw line, Well proportioned and ...smooth, not like 'crumpled concave' as Jian Xuan described.

.....

Jian Yao protests in silence and refuse to try his fish. She continues to finish what is on her plate.

Without saying another word, Bo Jinyan heads back up the stairs and once again, his tall white shadow disappears in the darkness.

Jian Yao is alone again.

She picks up the jacket. This looks familiar. Ah, it belongs to Fu Ziyu. It was hanging on a cloth rack on the day of their interview. Half way through their conversation, he stood up, walked over to the jacket to retrieve his mobile phone.

She suddenly remembers what Fu Ziyu said. Bo Jinyan is an eccentric guy with no friends.

So, Bo Jinyan is socially challenged and lack interpersonal communication skills.

That thought makes Jian Yao feels a little better. Unable to contain her curiosity any longer, she picks up the chopsticks. She chooses the smallest piece of fish fillet she can find from his plate and puts it in her mouth. Then she moves the remaining pieces of fish around the plate to make it look as if she has not touched the plate at all.

Sigh! She has to admit, it tastes much better than hers.

-

Jian Yao is awaked by loud banging sounds. She sits up from the sofa, and finds two windows moving with the strong wind. The banging sounds are caused by the windows hitting the frame.

The sky is still dark. The rain seems to have eased a little but the whistling sound of the wind is like a roaring beast.

- If the windows keep banging on the frames, the glass will shatter.

Immediately, she gets up and walks over. When she is in front of the window, she notices Bo Jinyan is also making his way down toward her, obvious concerned after hearing the banging sounds. His face is still mostly dark. He is still wearing those night vision goggles.

Jian Yao is too busy to talk to him now. She manages to grab the handle of one of the windows and quickly secure it back to the locked position. As she reaches out for the second window, a gush of wind rips through. A streak of white lightning blinds her eyes. The window is coming towards her with great force.

Jian Yao reflexively turns to escape, while lifting her hands to block her face. She feels a hand clenching her right wrist. She is pulled away from the window. Meanwhile behind her, there's a loud 'bang', followed by a large area of broken glass shattered all over the floor

What a close call.

She turns around to face Bo Jinyan. Because they are standing so close to each other, she can smell his scent, masculine and unfamiliar to her. His hand still holding her wrist.

"Thank you." She tries to loosen his grip. The next second, he bends down, lean her back into his arms and carries her.

Jian Yao is shocked: "What are you doing?"

Bo Jinyan looks at her: "I do not think you can bypass all broken glass on the ground without night vision goggles."

He walks toward the sofa.

With close proximity to his chest, his faint masculine scent is even more apparent. She feels safe in the arms of this tall and slender man.

Jian Yao feels a little awkward. She's never been in such close contact with a man before. But there is nothing she can do. She can only hold on to him for now.

"Thank you." Jian Yao says.

After putting her down on the sofa, he heads to the kitchen. Within a minute, he is back.

"I believe you have come to a conclusion." He says.

- Huh? Oh, the fish. She thought she concealed the evidence very well. How does he know?

With a honest and calm answer, she says "I admit, your fish is more delicious than mine, but can you not speak in such a condescending manner?"

Bo Jinyan ignores her criticism. Softly, he says to her: "Good night" Jian Yao is sure there's a smile on his face when he said that. A smile of victory.

He disappears up the stairs again..

-

Jian Yao wakes up. The storm has passed.

She takes a breathe of the clear cold morning air. Everything that happened last night is like a dream.

She folds Fu Ziyu's jacket and leaves it on the sofa, takes out a broom, cleans the broken glass in the living room and goes home.

-

There's not a lot of people on the street in this time of the day. She heads over to her step-father's house but he has gone to work. She sends a text to her mom to say she is okay. A few security guards walk past her.

Jian Yao overhears their conversation. They sound anxious and angry.

"It must be him, that Frankenstein."

"Yes, it must be him that has abducted the children."

"We have to do something."

.....

- Abduction?

Jian Yao remembers what Lee mentioned previously about the kidnapping cases. The security guards hop in a car and drive off.

Jian Yao knows this is something to do with those cases. She feels it's important to tell Lee about the security guards. She tries to call him but no one picks up the phone.

Maybe he is somewhere with poor phone signal reception. He did mention he is working in the countryside for a few days. She decides to try again later.

-

At home. She tells Jian Xuan about the security guards. Jian Xuan tells her that one of the sons of the guards has been missing for a day.

"They have reported it to the police." Jian Xuan said, "But the police won't do a filing unless he is missing for more than 48 hours."

Jian Yao nods. She tries to call Lee again but she still can't get through. Feeling very tired, she takes a nap.

-

Jian Yao wakes up around noon. Scattered clouds, bright sunshine. It's a nice day outside.

Jian Yao eats a late breakfast and gets ready to leave the house.

"Are you heading back to the villa? Didn't you just come back from there?"

Jian Xuan asked.

Jian Yao replied: "Just a little work left to complete. I should finish everything today." She pauses and adds, "Yesterday, I saw Bo Jinyan."

"Really? "Is it a scary encounter?" Asks Jian Xuan

Jian Yao don't know what to say. She gives a sigh. Soon, the work she is doing for Bo Jinyan will come to an end. Bo Jinyan and her will never meet again.

Life will return to normal. The holidays will be over. She will return to B city, where she will work as an intern for a company. She will find a boyfriend, get married and have kids.

But unknown to her now, her life is about to take a turn. This very afternoon, in the villa. Something unexpected will happen. Her life will change dramatically, leading her down a path that is so different from her current dreams and aspirations.

Chapter 6

The rain has stopped. Back to a clear blue sky. The water droplets on the leaves sparkle under the sun.

Walking along the tree lined avenue, Jian Yao enjoys the lovely scenery and feels a sense of peace and contentment within her.

She will say goodbye to Bo Jinyan soon. Even 'Frankenstein' deserves a final farewell.

The villa stands amidst greenery. It is a lovely place.

Jian Yao walks towards the entrance.

The front door is wide open.

Usually, the door is closed when she comes over. She knocks on the door, and it will automatically open. Bo Jinyan has a remote control in his room. It's never wide open like this.

She walks through and sees a number of people in the living room. They are whispering amongst themselves.

An unprecedented situation.

Jian Yao stops and stands at the door, listening carefully. One of the people turns around and sees her. "It's you!!"

Then a few people come out from the house, Jian Yao recognises them. They are the security guards she met this morning.

— — — —

The security guards are familiar with Jian Yao. She always goes to the dormitories they guard. That's where her step father lives. Some of them know her by name. One of the oldest guards raises his voice: "Jian Yao, why are you here?"

They look tense. Some of them have wooden sticks with them. Jian Yao says: "Eh.. I came by to eh... have a look..... eh... Why are you here? Is Lao Xiao's son found yet?"

Lao Xiao" is the father of the missing boy.

One of them answers. ". Not yet. The Frankenstein is not home yet."

Jian Yao is about to ask another question. Another security guards suddenly thinks of an idea. "Can you give us a hand?"

Jian Yao looks at him, nods firmly: "Tell me what you want me to do."

The security guard knows that Jian Yao has a good friend that works in the Police Department. If she is willing to put in a word for them, the police might agree to take on the case earlier than the required 48 hours. .

They give her the details of what happened.

The child went missing yesterday afternoon. All the relatives and friends had searched in every possible place they could think of. Still, there was no trace of the boy. The only clue is from a shopkeeper near the train station. He saw the child going into a gaming parlour in the morning. He also saw "Frankenstein" there at the time, talking to the young boy.

Jian Yao asks: "How did the shopkeeper know the person who talked to the young boy is the owner of this house?"

A security guard replies: "Ms Jian, do you not know that he's famous for wearing a trench coat and a mask on everywhere he goes?. He is such a strange guy. Everybody knows he lives in the mountain, Everybody thinks he is crazy. He must have abducted the child!"

Jian Yao is shocked - She is only back in town for the school term break. She has no idea.

— — — —

Jian Yao enters the house with them.

The house still looks the same as when she left in the morning. The security guards look around to see if they can find any clues. Two of the guards walk up the stairs to the second floor.

A middle-aged security guard squats beside the sofa. His eyes are red. He looks crushed and desperate. Jian Yao recognises him. He is Lao Xiao.

When the security guards told her that Bo Jinyan has abducted the children, her first instinct was 'It's impossible.' She has always thought he is novelist that specialises in detective stories.

However, he did speak to the child...

Suddenly, her cell phone rings. It's from a number she is not familiar with.

She walks away and answers the phone: "Hello?"

The voice of the caller is exceptionally low, with a more nasal hoarse sound than last night, like someone who just woke up: "Please tell them to leave immediately. Thanks. " he says in a very calm tone.

With the cell phone still by her ears, she looks at the people who have congregated in his house.

FZ has her resume, so that's how he knows her phone number. So, he is at home after all.

Jian Yao speaks in low voice: "Mr.Bo. They have something very important that they need to speak to you about. Can you please come downstairs?"

Bo Jinyan gives a laugh: "If I meet with every person who wants to meet me , I will be dead by now...."

- Huh? Jian Yao is slightly confused.

"... from exhaustion."

-

Jian Yao keeps quiet for a moment: "Since you do not want to talk to them, can you tell them yourself. I will not tell them for you."

She is obviously annoyed. Bo Jinyan pauses for a while.

Then he says: "Well, tell them that what they are looking for is in the room on the first floor. The key to the room is inside the kitchen cupboard, on the third shelf." He hangs up.

With those instructions, Jian Yao goes to the kitchen and retrieves the key.

She walks back to the living room, and says to the guards: ".. Actually, I am doing a bit of work for Mr.Bo, but I don't know him that well. He just phoned me and asked me to show you this."

-

This is the room that is supposed to be out of bounds. Yao inserts the key into the slot and unlocks the door. Her heart is pounding.

What will they see? Why is Bo Jinyan leading them to this room?

A security guard opens the door slowly.

The lighting inside is very dim. Slowly, she realises what is inside those jars and bottles on the shelves.

Everyone is stunned. Nobody made a sound.

Inside the bottle that is sitting on the shelf closest to them, is an eyeball. Pale, with lax pupil, as if it is staring at them.

Other bottles in the room contain lips, teeth, wrists, heart, male genitals

A security guard exclaims: "Murderer! Psychopath! !" Then he turns and runs down the stairs and out of the house. Others immediately follow him. "We have to keep this place secure before the police arrives. Let's guard at the front door." Lao Xiao is standing there like a statue. "Come on, Let's leave this place first. The police will be here soon." Says one of the guards. He then helps Lao Xiao down the stairs and back out into the courtyard.

Jian Yao feels a chill slowly infiltrating her limbs and her body. She takes a look around the room. Nobody is here anymore. Except her. Suddenly a thought comes to mind.

She picks up the jar with the eye. She tilts it and looks at the bottom of the jar. There is a small yellow sticker.

It is an English label:

"Number: 42;

Content: left eye;

Gender: Female;

Age: 27;

Cause of death: accident, excessive bleeding;

Time of death: 15 August 27

Donation hospital: Ohio State Hospital.

There is also a hospital seal: - human organ specimen for research.

Jian Yao is relieved.

She hears the sound of police siren, and it is getting louder. Then it stops. She walks downstairs to the entrance.

Just stepping out of the front door, she sees two policemen being surrounded by the security guards. Meanwhile, she hears a bang behind her. The door is shut.

Jian Yao looks at the closed door.

Bo Jinyan led them to the room with all the specimens to scare them away.

-

The two policemen that are here are civilian police. Jian Yao tells them what had just happened. Although she explains that those bottles are only specimens for research purposes, the security guards are still convinced that Bo Jinyan is the one who abducted the children.

The two policeman knock on the door. They want Bo Jinyan to personally explain what's happening.

No response. Security guards start to talk amongst themselves: "He is trying to hide from us because he is guilty."

- What's on his mind? Jian Yao is also puzzled by his actions.

One of the police walks over to Jian Yao. "You have his phone number, right? Can you please call him to open the door?"

Jian Yao nods. At the request of the police, she dials the number and turns on the speakerphone function. "The police is outside your house. They need to speak to you. Please open the door."

Bo Jinyan stays quiet for a few seconds before answering: “ They have a search warrant or an arrest warrant?”

The policeman shakes his head. Jian Yao replies: "No."

Bo Jinyan: "Then why should I open the door? Goodbye." He hangs up again.

The policemen look at each other. They are getting very annoyed: "Call the bureau to consult!" Jian Yao is also offended by his attitude. But she thinks to herself. He is not a criminal. Criminals don't behave this way.

Another police siren sound gets closer. Everyone looks toward the direction of where the sound is coming from.

A middle-aged man, surrounded by several police officers are walking towards them. One of the officers is Li. Jian Yao recognises the middle-aged man. He is chief Inspector.

-

In this little courtyard, the situation seems to get somewhat complicated.

Lee is surprised to see Jian Yao here- “What are you doing here?”

Jian Yao: “Long story. Why is Chief here?”

Li Xunran gives a little laugh. “Long story. We only just found out from central office that ‘he’ lives here. So, we are here to see him. “ There is a sense of excitement in his voice. “ Are you here to help find the missing children? Reports have been filed about him being a suspect for kidnapping. There must be some mistake. How could he possibly be the offender? I'll explain later. Gotta go.” Then he runs off.

-

Once again, someone is knocking on the front door. This time, it's Li.

Once again, the request has been denied. No one answers.

And once again, Jian Yao is asked to call him with her phone.

All eyes are on her. Jian Yao has no choice but to press the numbers again. Speakerphone function is on... once again. Before she can even say anything, Bo Jinyan speaks with a slightly annoyed voice "Are you so incapable? Seems like you can't even remember events that happened within the last 24 hours? Did you forget how late I went to bed last night? How many times are you going to call me?"

Jian Yao is about to respond, but suddenly she feels the crowd looking at her strangely. It's too hard to explain to them what he meant. She decides to give up. So she goes straight to the point: "Bo Jinyan, The Chief Inspector is here to see you."

"I don't want to see him." He replies.

"Let me talk to him." The Chief Inspector stretches out his hand and ask for Jian Yao's phone.

He walks away from the crowd. They talk for a while. He walks back with a smile on his face.

-

Chief walks to the front door. This time, the door opens. Chief, Li Xunran and Jian Yao goes inside the house.

Jian Yao taps Li Xunran on the shoulder: "Who is he?"

Li Xunran looks at Jian Yao: "How do you know him? What is the relationship between you two?"

"I am working for him. As a translator."

Li Xunran grabs her by her arm: "You work for him!" He says with an envious voice.

"Bo Jinyan. Associate professor from University of Maryland. The world's youngest criminal psychology expert, Consultant for the Ministry of Public Security. And he chose to stay in our little town! "

Chapter 7

A cloud of twilight dust covers the atmosphere. Jian Yao stands in front of the window. She looks at the police station that's situated directly opposite to her house.

After the Chief entered the house, the police asked everyone to leave the villa. She returned home before the Chief finished meeting with Bo Jinyan.

Jian Xuan comes out from the study. She hands over a journal to her sister: "I want the great god's autograph!"

Jian Yao turns to look at her: "Really?" Yesterday, she was still calling Bo Jinyan a "male demon."

Jian Xuan nods: "I am a super fan of the US series "Criminal minds'. Here I am, living with a real life expert in the field in the same town. I can't miss this opportunity!!"

Jian Yao turns around and looks out the window:. "I'm not going to ask him for an autograph."

"Why?" Jian Xuan is surprised. She doesn't understand why her sister is so against the idea. "Sis, is there something that's bothering you?"

Jian Yao gives a sigh. "Nothing. Do you know what he will say when I ask for an autograph?"

"What?"

Jian Yao tries to imitate his arrogant tone. Lowering her voice: "If I satisfy everyone's wish to get my autograph, I'd be without a hand by now. "

Jian Xuan: "Ah?"

Jian Yao: "..... detached due to over-using ."

Jian Xuan rolls her eyes: "Your joke is not even funny?"

Jian Yao laughs: "This is not a joke."

— — —

Jian Yao is very shocked to hear the identity of Bo Jinyan. Her first impression of him is that he is a very arrogant, low EQ, naive introvert.

Can such a person really be a world-renowned expert?

Well, sometimes life does throw you some surprises.

The phone rings. It's Li, Jian Yao immediately answers the phone.

"I see that you are home. Are you free to come to my office now?"

-

The distance between the police housing compound and the offices are less than a few hundred meters away. A few minutes later, Jian Yao enters Li's office.

Li Xunran gives her a glass of water. His bright eyes are looking at her. A lot of the ladies working in the police station consider him an attractive man.

He does not say a word. Jian Yao doesn't speak to him either. She sips the water he gave her. The atmosphere is a little awkward. Finally, he asks the question that really bothers him: "Is Bo Jinyan wooing you?"

Jian Yao almost chokes: "Are you crazy? That's not even possible."

Li Xunran looks at her. He knows she is telling the truth. He mumbles to himself: "Although you are quite smart, you are not in the top 1%....."

Jian Yao is slightly offended. He continues: "If he is not trying to woo you, why would he insist that the assistant must be you?"

Jian Yao is shocked: "What assistant?"

Li Xunran answers: "His assistant for the investigation, of course."

Jian Yao is slightly confused: "The case information needs to be translated into English?"

"No, the case about the missing teenagers. Nothing needs to be translated."

Jian Yao is even more confused. Clearly, Li Xunran is not joking. "Why me? I'm not even part of the police force."

— —

A few hours ago.

After a brief chat with the chief, Bo Jinyan agrees to take on the case and assist the police to find the kidnapper. But he has one condition, He wants Jian Yao to be his assistant.

He doesn't care that Jian Yao is not part of the police force. It is not his problem. It's the chief's responsibility to see that his requests are met. As Li Xunran is a good friend of Jian Yao, the task of persuading her to join the operation falls on his shoulder.

Li's initial plan was to volunteer his service to Bo Jinyan. To be his assistant. Before he met Bo Jinyan, he thought Bo Jinyan would be an older gentleman. He is surprised to find that Bo Jinyan is about the same age as himself.

Bo Jinyan was sitting on the couch reading the newspaper in the police conference room. Without even lifting his head, he answered: "Thanks for volunteering, but I do not know you. I am not interested."

.....

- That's why Li Xunran is behaving in such a strange way. He wants to learn under Bo Jinyan but is refused.

Li Xunran : "Why you?"

Jian Yao: How would I know? Go and ask him yourself."

Li: "Our policy is not to allow civilians to join our investigation. But Professor Bo has just been awarded the Ministry of Public Security honorary inspector. This is a position of a very high ranking. Since it's the request of professor Bo, we will make an exception. But it's up to you to decide whether you want to accept this post."

Jian Yao thinks for a while. She shakes her head:" I want to talk to Professor Bo first. I have a few queries about the post."

Li Xunran nods: "He just left our office. He should be back at the villa soon."

-

Jian Yao walks home, contemplating about what Li Xunran told her.

She opens the door and looks around. The living room is empty. She sits down on the sofa, and hear some noise coming from the study.

- Must be Jian Xuan working at her computer. She thought.

She picks up the phone and is about to call Bo Jinyan. Before she hits the dial button, she raises her voice to talk to her sister in the study: "You'll never guess what Li Xunran said to me. Your 'great god' wants me to be his investigation assistant. This seems unreal. I feel as if I am struck by lightning."

- No comment from her sister? She must be on headphones. Jian Yao presses the dial button.

Suddenly, there's music coming from the study. A ring tone from a mobile. That doesn't sound like Juan's phone? Her ring tone is rap music, not a classical symphony.

Then the front door is opened. Juan walks in. Seeing her sister in the lounge, Jian Xuan asks enthusiastically: "You are back! I looked everywhere for you. Where did you go? You didn't even bring your mobile phone with you. Where's 'great god'? Is he still in the study?"

Jian Yao is stunned for a moment" Great God? Study?"

"Yeah, he came by to see you. You don't know he is here? Go! Phew... Let me calm down first. Handsome! He is too handsome! I must have mistaken him for someone else previously!"

-

Jian Yao takes a peep through the study door.

The lights are on, the whole room has a warm feel about it. Classical music is playing softly in the background. She can faintly hear the sound of a tea cup being placed on the wooden table. Jian Yao gently opens the door and walks in.

In the middle of the room, a man is sitting on a red couch.

He is wearing a black suit and a white shirt. No tie. One leg folds on top of the other, he is holding a book in his right hand, reading. On a side table next to him, there is a cup of tea and a small dish of fruits.

A very elegant scene.

He puts the book down and looks up at Jian Yao.

The man is undoubtedly very tall. You can tell even when he's sitting down.

He has quite broad shoulders. He looks good in a suit.

Their eyes meet. Finally, she is able to look at him properly. He's not just a shadow in the dark anymore. His eyes are long and slender. The pupils are very dark, a sharp contrast to his fair complexion. He is a handsome man. But his gaze is cold, as if he wants to keep a distance with the world.

.....

Jian Yao sits across from him. She feels a little uneasy.

They have had several encounters in the past. But they are either on the phone or in the dark. They are no strangers to one another, but yet they don't really know each other either.

She is about to speak when he looks at the book again: "How does that feel like?" He asked.

Jian Yao: Huh?

Bo Jinyan: "To be struck by lightning?"

Jian Yao is a little embarrassed. She ask him a question instead of giving him an answer : " Why are you in my house?"

Bo Jinyan lifts his eye toward her:. "Background check."

"A harmonious family. Gets on well with your classmates. Studies in the city and returns home during your school vacations. You don't live with your mother and your step father, but choose to live alone in this old vacant house. Perhaps you are not as cheerful and happy as your appearance suggests"

"Your father died when you were six years old. Your mother and step father loves you and you get along with them. You are not the paranoid or fragile type. What happened during your childhood that has left a hole in your heart?"

Jian Yao's face suddenly turned white. And then, Bo Jinyan changes the subject:"This is a trivial problem compared to this other one I just found." He raises the book in his hand: "You are into novels that have no scientific basis and no logic?"

Jian Yao notices the title of the book - "I'll accompany you to ends of the universe." It's one of her romance novels.

Jian Yao argues: "This is a romance novel. Logic is not important."

Bo Jinyan opens the book and turns to one of the page: "You even wrote annotations....."

She blushes a little, and took the book off him: "Who said you can touch my books?" She read it in high school. At the time, she found the story very touching. But she was only sixteen then.

"The girl outside." said Bo Jinyan: "She said I can take any book in the study."

Jian Yao puts the book back on the shelf. Not wasting any more time, she asks: "Why do you want me to be your assistant?"

Bo Jinyan smiles: "It's obvious. There are so many reasons for it."

Jian Yao is a bit surprised: "For example?"

"For example, I do not like to be disturbed. For example, I need someone to deal with the police and reporters on my behalf. I need someone to do all the tedious and time consuming tasks. For example, you are the only person I know in this town. And you can fish."

Jian Yao: "..... I need some time to consider."

Bo Jinyan takes a glance at her. He stands up, picks up the jacket and starts walking out. Before he gets out of the room, he turns around and says to her: "I only catch the most vicious criminals. Because only I am capable to do so. This case will not take more than one week. That's all the time I want from you. If I were you, I won't waste my time 'considering'. See you tomorrow. Please arrive at my villa by 8am. "

Chapter 8

Another chilly winter morning. The rising sun casts a ray of soft golden light over the mountain side. The trees gives a gentle glow in the morning sun. Hardly anyone comes to this part of the town. It's always so quiet and peaceful here. Except for the little episode yesterday.

Jian Yao walks quietly toward the villa.

She enters the house she is now fairly familiar with. Upstairs, the gates are open.

Cautiously, she steps into Bo Jinyan's 'territory'.

"Bo Jinyan? Bo Jinyan?"

No answer.

Jian Yao walks up to the first room.

The door is open. She walks inside. Near the window, a stack of files sit on top of a table. There are a few books scattered there as well. It's rather messy. A big blanket is left unfold on a sofa next to the table. A half-finished cup of tea sits on the small coffee table.

Opposite the sofa hangs a large whiteboard. It's covered with photos, with lots of captions and words written around them.

Jian Yao walks over to the whiteboard.

There are a total of nine photographs. These are the pictures of the missing teenagers. All of them are rural children. Underneath three of the photos, Bo Jinyan wrote down the locations where the boys went missing. South of the market. Train station. Materials Quarter.

Li has briefed Jian Yao about this. They have enough evidence to determine the abduction locations for three of the boys that went missing. As for the rest of the teenagers, for all they know, they could have disappeared anywhere.

Then there's the second row of words. More locations, places with similar qualities to those three above - Eastern market, bus station, farmers market and so on. Jian Yao understands their significance - Traffic, video game movie theatres, Internet cafes etc. Places teenagers like to hang out. Possible hunting grounds for the kidnappers.

But these places are dispersed throughout the city. Looking for the criminals will be like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Further down the whiteboard, there's more words, a combination of English and Chinese. The handwriting is so messy that Jian Yao can't work out what some of the words are. On the corner of the white board is a drawing of a little turtle. It's only a stick figure, but it's very cute.

So 'great god' likes to doodle when he's analysing data. How adorable. Jian Yao smiles to herself.

There's a phrase within the messy writing that is written in a bigger and clearer font than the rest.

"No witnesses."

No witnesses?

Everybody knows this. So why is he emphasising the point?

Jian Yao doesn't understand that. She takes out her phone and sends a text message to Li. "Kp: No witnesses."

(I am not sure what KP means. It's in the original text. In English. So I left it there.)

--

Last night, Jian Yao made a decision. She called Li.

Li immediately went to her home. The first thing he said was: "I still want to work with him and learn from him."

Jian Yao is not too surprised: "But... How?"

"Whenever he tells you something - conclusions or ideas he comes up with, theory, opinions, everything! Can you please write them down and let me know? This is not 'infringement'. Whatever information you can access, I should be able to access too."

Jian Yao replied: "I do not know much about crime and psychology. But I will do my best to help you."

So, whenever Jian Yao finds a key point, she texts Li.

(Ahh.... Kp means Key point. I see.)

Li replies almost immediately: "?????"

Jian Yao smiles. Well, she only agreed to be the messenger. The rest is up to him to figure out himself. Just then, Bo Jinyan walks in wearing a pair of white pyjamas.

This is so different from her expectations.

Yesterday, even though he was arrogant and conceited, showing how inconsiderate he can be to the feelings of others; he was wearing a suit, looking very prim and proper. Today, he is wearing a pair of PJs, walking around barefooted. He is still the same handsome man she saw

yesterday. Only today, the expressions on this man's face shows that he is not happy. Not happy at all.

He walks pass Jian Yao. He turns and looks in her direction. Jian Yao thinks he is going to speak to her. But he seems to stare straight pass her. He picks up the cup on the side table. Walks out of the room and heads downstairs.

- Well, if you have nothing to say to me. I will just keep quiet then.

She follows him down in silence.

In the kitchen. He bents over to take a carton of milk from the refrigerator and heats it up in the microwave. He takes out a few slices of bread, put them in the toaster, then throws a bottle of jam on the table. Then he sits down at the dining table.

- He's going to talk about work now. Thought Jian Yao.

Suddenly, he put his arms on the table, then buries his head into the hole between his arms..

The microwave gives a "ding" sound. He looks up, stands up, takes the food and drink to the table and starts having his breakfast.

"Another late night?" Jian Yao asks.

"Umm..." His throat give a little groan.

After a while, he looks up at her again. He frowns: "You've changed your style of dressing."

Jian Yao looks at her little black skirt. She has dressed more formally today because he was in a suit yesterday. She thought she should match his dressing style.

He keeps staring at her. Jian Yao begins to feel a little uneasy. Then she hears him say: "This style doesn't suit you. You look prettier in your usual clothing."

Jian Yao is surprised by his words. After he finishes his sentence, he continues to have his breakfast.

Flattering words are always welcomed by woman, especially when it's from someone like him.

Jian Yao gives him a smile: "Thanks."

After he finishes his breakfast, he looks brighter, and more 'awake'.

Bo Jinyan: "My rookie assistant, come upstairs. Collate all the information on the case, and then wait for me in the car."

-

In the driveway, Jian Yao sees a parked police car. The driver looks like he has been waiting for a while.

Jian Yao sits in the back seat. She starts to read the information on the case while waiting. After a few minutes, Bo Jinyan appears.

He is in a suit again, with a black coat on top. A coffee brown scarf wrapped around his neck. He is wearing a mask on his face, the type that looks a bit like surgical mask, revealing only a pair of slender dark eyes.

He sits beside Jian Yao. He takes off his mask and scarf: "We are ready to go." He gives instructions to the driver.

Jian Yao: "Why are you wearing a mask that covers your face?"

He looks at her as if it's an inappropriate question: "Don't you think it's cold out there?"

Jian Yao: "..... No, not really."

So that's the reason. People from the north do not adapt well to the winter temperatures of the south. Bo Jinyan is not a local. He wears a mask to keep his face warm. This is a common practice in the northern towns, but people in the south will find it strange. No wonder people label him as "Frankenstein."

The car is leaving town. They are on the national highway.

Jian Yao asks: "Where are we going?"

Bo Jinyan adjusts his sitting position a little. The car is not very spacious. Jian Yao moves closer to the door to give him more room. His body takes up more than half the back seat.

"We need to get his address." says Bo Jinyan

"He? Who is he?" asks Jian Yao.

Bo Jinyan smiles: "The criminal, of course."

-

Jian Yao looks at him: "You mean... there is only one person responsible for the kidnapping? And it's someone from the area?" Li told her the police suspects a human trafficking gang is involved, or someone from further afield, not so close to home. But Bo Jinyan is going down a totally different path.

Bo Jinyan looks at her: "You are not so dumb after all. There's a similar pattern to all the disappearances. All of them have the same distinctive and unique 'personality' about them. It can only be done by one person."

While Jian Yao is processing what he just said, the phone rings.

Bo Jinyan glances at her: "Ah! Time to report to your little boyfriend?"

Jian Yao looks at him: "He is not my boyfriend."

Bo Jinyan says no more. He closes his eyes for a nap. "Do you mind if I update him?" Jian Yao asks.

"Do as you please. I don't care."

-

The police car stops in a nearby township.

Along the highway, there are line of houses on both side of the road. There are four or five low rise buildings, and a few old huts.

Bo Jinyan and Jian Yao walks to one of the huts - the home of the first missing boy - Fu Mingyi's parents' house. No one knows where Fu was abducted. They knock on the front door.

The house looks old and tired. The paint are stripped off, cracks run along the side of the walls. Inside, Fu's parents looks as if life has been drained out of them. Yao can feel the pain they carry.

-

According to the police statement, on the day of his disappearance, Fu left home early in the morning. He was meant to arrive at Tong city around 8:00am. He just turned 15 years old. He's a secondary

student. He was supposed to go to Tong city to stay with his aunt for two weeks, to attend some tutorial classes for the upcoming school exams. His aunt called his parents around midday after he failed to arrive. Bo Jinyan asked the parents a few more questions. But nothing provided any clue as to where he could have gone.

-

They go into Fu's bedroom. His room is filled with lots of stuff - children toys, masks, kaleidoscope, game cards, and handheld gaming devices. All these items are now keepsakes for the old couple to remember their beloved son.

Jian Yao: "Anything useful?"

Instead of answering her question, Bo Jinyan says: "Out."

Just before she walks out of the room, he says: "Please use your brain. It's not a piece of furniture. I want every piece of information you can find on Fu. There must be clues hiding in this house that will tell us where he went that morning."

By now, Jian Yao is used to the way he speaks. She doesn't get offended anymore.

-

They walk out to the backyard. There's a poultry shed.

Inside the shed, there's around 12 chickens. It's probably one of the main source of income for the family. There is a cabinet beside the shed. A basket of eggs sits on top of the cabinet.

Jian Yao turns back into the house to find Fu's mother.

-

After some time, Jian Yao returns to Fu's room.

"I found something. But it's probably useless." She said.

Bo Jinyan keeps his eyes on the ground: "Speak."

Jian Yao looks at his handsome face. She feels a little uneasy to share her little humble opinion with a world renowned expert.

She clears her throat and speaks out: "Fu does alright at school. He doesn't seem to be the academic type, but he gets on well with his classmates. They like playing video games but his family is too poor to buy a console and games for him to play at home. So he likes to hang out at video game parlours and internet cafes."

"The day Fu went missing, he took a basket of eggs to bring to his aunt..." Jian Yao continues.

"Stop!" Bo Jinyan interrupts her. Looking at her with his clear sharp eyes: "How do you know he brought eggs?"

Jian Yao replies: "I noticed there's a basket of eggs in the backyard. I thought, since the parents wanted their child to board with the aunt for a period of time, they will surely give a little gift, such as fresh eggs. Ha ha.. not relevant to the case, right? Other than that, I can't find anything else "

Jian Yao's voice suddenly stops, because Bo Jinyan steps forward, bends over to hug her.

Jian Yao stiffens and looks at Bo Jinyan. He releases her quickly and looks at her with a smile.

"Bring eggs to aunt! You're a genius!"

Jian Yao: "This is the basic manners"

Bo Jinyan smiles: "Fu Ziyu said you are a very well mannered person, so you can complement me in places I am lacking in. He is right..."

Jian Yao: "....."

Bo Jinyan opens the map app on his phone. He points to a location and says: "This is where he went missing."

He is pointing to a farmer's market. "Why?"

Bo Jinyan seems a little more patient with her now. He explains: "Money. He's carrying a basket of eggs. It's so inconvenient. If he didn't go straight to his aunt's house. He must be gone to the market to sell the eggs for money. Then he can go to the video game parlour. This market is not far from his aunt's house, and very close to a video game parlour."

"He loves video games, but he doesn't have enough money. So he secretly sold the eggs. He often brings eggs to his auntie's house so he is betting that his aunt will not find out his mischief."

Jian Yao listens and nods: "Where do we go from here?"

Bo Jinyan's smile deepens.

-

They return to the car. Leaving Tong city, they are back on the national highway.

Bo Jinyan takes out a notebook and starts to write frantically. Jian Yao is busy texting Li with all the updates.

When Bo Jinyan has finished writing, he throws her the notebook:
"Give them a call."

Jian Yao picks up the book. She reads what Bo Jinyan wrote.

"Male, aged 25-30, local, slim, ordinary looking;

Lives alone within 3km from the farmer's market. The place where he works is close to the market too.

No car.

Strong communication skills, articulate, frequent visitor of video game parlours, movie theatres and other places teenagers like to hang out. "

Jian Yao looks at him: "Why Why does the offender live near the location of the first disappearance? And why is he between 25-30 years old??"

Bo Jinyan puts his hands behind his head: "I have already written all the reasons on the whiteboard. Did you not see them this morning?"

Then he opens the map apps on his phone again, pointing: "Tell them to immediately search the forest to the east of the farmers' markets. If they find anything, give us a call immediately."

Jian Yao heart is shocked: "Find? Find what?"

Bo Jinyan, glancing at her: "You've already guessed the answer. Why do you ask me?"

Bo Jinyan smiles: "My dear assistant, I told you before. I am not interested in human trafficking gangs, or other mediocre stuff like that. Serial killers are my specialty."

Chapter 9

The police car is still traveling on the national highway.

Jian Yao is lost for words. She cannot believe this.

The policeman that is driving the car asks Bo Jinyan: "Professor Bo, you mean those kids are dead?"

Bo Jinyan says slowly: "I am afraid so."

The scenery outside the window changes rapidly. Jian Yao asks: "Even if there's only one person that is committing the crime, he may still be a trafficker. Why are you so sure that it's a serial killer?"

Bo Jinyan's pale handsome face has no expression. Looking outside the window, his eyes seem to be staring into a different world.

Bo Jinyan: "Because I understand them."

-

Jian Yao calls Li.

Even though she has her doubts, she calls Li Xunran to tell him what Bo Jinyan just told her.

Li Xunran stands in the office with his speakerphone function on. The whole police station is in uproars after hearing Bo Jinyan's words: "Why? How did he reach such a conclusion?"

Jian Yao: "Wait." she puts down the phone and looks at Bo Jinyan: "They want to know the reasons behind your conclusion."

Bo Jinyan leans his body back and closes his eyes: "I'll do the briefing later. Ask them to find the bodies first."

"Bodies?" The police can't believe what they heard. Neither are they familiar with the concept of briefing. They still have their doubts about whether they should change their direction of investigation. "Jian Yao, this is too big a decision to make without understanding the facts fully. Chief is with me. He asks if Professor Bo can explain his findings to us first?"

Jian Yao ponders. She looks at Bo Jinyan again: "Can't you just give them a briefing over the phone?"

Bo Jinyan opens his eyes: "The last time I did a briefing, it was in the central hall in the University of Maryland. Now you want me to...." He glances outside the window: "..... in front of the tolling booth of the 18th Forrest section of the National Highway?"

Jian Yao wants to laugh: "So, will you be less convincing just because you are briefing outside the tolling booth?"

Bo Jinyan pulls out his sleep mask from his coat pocket and turns his head away from Jian Yao. His response is clear. Stop bothering me.

Jian Yao looks at the time. It's only another hour till they will arrive the police station. She can't possibly tell them directly that he is reluctant to do it over the phone. So she says: "Professor Bo is preparing the content for the briefing right now. We also need to return to the villa to collect some information that we will use at the briefing. We are almost back in town. We will come over to the police station as soon as possible to present to you all our findings."

Jian Yao puts down the phone and gives a sigh. Bo Jinyan removes his googles and says in a deep voice: "Liar!"

Jian Yao : "Just shut up!"

-

By the time they arrive the police station, it's almost evening.

Li Xunran and a few other officers are waiting outside the station. Jian Yao's eyes are drawn to the 3rd floor, where the conference room is located. That is where the briefing will be held. The last time Jian Yao was there, she was six years old.

Memories starts to trickle like water drops into her mind.

A voice besides her: "Lips pressed together, the upper eyelid drooping Why did I just see a typical expression of pain, hiding within your calm appearance?"

Jian Yao does not expect Bo Jinyan to be so observant. Like he said, she thought she hid her emotions well.

Staring into her beautiful eyes, he continues: " That 'hole' in your heart... is something to do with your father."

Not wanting to dwell on the subject any longer, Jian Yao answers: " You have mistaken. The source of my pain is actually you, because you are about to brief the squad."

That took Bo Jinyan by surprise: "I beg your pardon?"

Jian Yao steps back: "As your assistant, it is my duty to remind you that even though you might be better at investigation/criminal profiling, that doesn't give you the right to mock them. They are a very diligent and responsible team of police. Also, they might not appreciate your dry humour. So, when they ask you questions, can you please answer them patiently without being sarcastic? "

“How did you come up with this strange conclusion?” Bo Jinyan looks at her arrogantly, “If I am ever sarcastic, it’s always because there is a gap in the IQ levels. The nature the work of a policeman is very different from mine, why would I mock them because they have little understanding of criminal psychology?”

Feeling a little offended, he walks on.

— — — —

In the conference room.

All the policeman are sitting around the big table that takes up most of the room. Chief is there too. After a quick introduction, Li Xunran invites Bo Jinyan to address the team.

Jian Yao is sitting at the back.

Bo Jinyan stands up. He quickly sweep a place over everyone there. He is not smiling. There is not much expression on his face. He starts to speak. This is a confident, articulate and professional Bo Jinyan. Jian Yao has met the arrogant and sarcastic Bo Jinyan; the ‘I don't give a shXX about you’ Bo Jinyan; the warm and cuddly Bo Jinyan. But this is a different side of him that she has not seen before.

"We are looking for a local. Aged between 25-30 year old. Male. Medium height. Slim. Average looking. Likes to frequent video games parlours, movie theatres and internet cafes. It is also possible that he works in one of those places.

He is streetwise. He does a lot of detailed planning before each kidnapping. He chooses his victims carefully. And all of them are either young workers from out of town, dropouts (of schools), or immature

boys from the rural areas. They have little life experience. They are not as strong as him physically, so they can easily seduced or abducted.

He approaches most of his victims in the downtown area. His great interpersonal skills allows him to relate to those boys and gain their trusts. Then he will lure them to a specific location, to be killed.

He does not use a car because it will draw attention from the public. And he doesn't own a car anyway.

He lives alone. He is either renting, or staying in a house left to him by his parents, because he won't be able to afford a house himself. He lives in a secluded area, not too far from the farmers market. His house is possibly where he kills the boys.

This is the preliminary profile. Once you find the bodies, I will give you a more detailed profile."

The whole room is quiet.

After a long pause, Bo Jinyan says: "Any questions?"

The policemen look at each other. Li Xunran asks the first question: "Why do you think the criminal is between 25 to 30 years old?"

"He can't be too young. If he's too young, he's not financially independent. Nor will he be living alone, or have the ability to lure the victims and physically kill them. He can't be too old either. Two people walking together with a huge age gap is more conspicuous. Also, he is a psychopath. Psychopaths generally starts budding during adolescence. To reach the state of perversion he is in now will require a gestation period of more than a decade." Answers Bo Jinyan.

Li Xunran nods. He continues with his second question: "Why do you think he lives near the farmer's market. It's only one of the many possible locations the boys went missing."

"He's more bold than the average person. But he is not very intelligent. You can tell from his choice of vulnerable victims, and the monotonous way of how he operates. When psychopaths commit their first crime, they never dare to venture too far from their place of murder. Our criminal is not sure if he can convince a teenager to go somewhere that's too far away. He needs to keep the travel distance short.

Everyone nods. It's hard to believe, but all the pieces seem to fit well together. After his briefing, everything seems to be so simple and logical.

More questions followed. Bo Jinyan patiently answered them. He is often very brief in his explanation. Nevertheless, it's always very clear and to the point.

"Professor, why did you say you can give us a complete profile once we find the bodies?" Li Xunran is asking one last question.

Bo Jinyan flashes a haughty smile. "Because the desires of his heart will be 'written' on the bodies."

-

When Jian Yao and Bo Jinyan returns to the villa, it's past nine o'clock.

Once they go inside the house, Bo Jinyan hurries upstairs. Jian Yao asks him: "What should we do now?"

Bo Jinyan: "Shower."

So Jian Yao waits downstairs.

Today is the first time Jian Yao saw him in his professional capacity. Her impression of him has greatly improved. In his work, he is more than just a respectable scholar. He's a good detective. Very observant. Quick on his feet, and knowledgeable in what he does. Though he is still cold and unapproachable, there's something about him that makes people feel that he can be trusted. That they can depend on him.

It is getting very late. But Jian Yao understands that criminal cases are time sensitive. She expects to work 24/7 if need be.

After a while, Bo Jinyan walks downstairs in his bathrobe. His hair is still damp from the shower. He sits down on the sofa and picks up the book and reads.

Jian Yao asks: "Are we working tonight?"

He does not look up: "No."

"What about assisting the police to find the bodies and the criminal?"

He glances briefly at her: "That is something the police are responsible for. I am responsible for analysing and profiling."

The police are excavating the area where bodies might be dumped. There is nothing they can do to help at this time. So she stands up: "Then I'll go home first, and come back tomorrow."

Bo Jinyan turns over a page, and spit out a word: 'No.'

Jian Yao waits for a further explanation. Slowly, he says: "Your time belongs to me now."

If these words are from the mouth of another male, it might seem ambiguous. But when it's from Bo Jinyan, it is literally what it means. No more. No less.

- But there's nothing to do at the moment.

Jian Yao: "..... I'll head home first. You can call me if you need me."

Bo Jinyan: "No, if we need to examine the bodies at midnight, do I have to spend extra time to pick you up from your house?"

Every second counts. The faster they are able to catch the criminal, the less likely there will be another victim.

Jian Yao asks: "Where should I sleep?"

Bo Jinyan "Fu Ziyu's room."

— — —

Jian Yao lies on the wide bed in Fu Ziyu's room. It's around 11pm. Bo Jinyan is still awake. He seems to be busy working in that first room. She can hear his footsteps, sounds of books being taken from the shelves, sounds of turning pages, sounds of words being scribbled on the white board...

— — —

She is awakened by the ring tone of her phone.

"Jian Yao, we found the bodies." In the background, she can hear the whistling sound of the wind, voices of other police working, "A lot of bodies." says Li.

Jian Yao immediately gets out of the room.

Down the dark hallway, she knocks on Bo Jinyan's door.

No response.

She takes out her phone and calls him. It rings for a long time, but there is no answer

- Is he fast asleep or is he somewhere else?

Jian Yao runs downstairs to retrieve his room key from the kitchen cupboard.

She slowly opens the door. Warm air rushes over her face - his room is warm and toasty.

She finds the switch on the wall and turns the lights on. In the middle of the king size bed, a man is sleeping soundly.

Bo Jinyan is still wearing his bathrobe over his PJs. He has an interesting sleeping posture. Facing upwards, his body is straight like a tree trunk. Hands on either side of his body.

Jian Yao pushes his arm gently: "Bo Jinyan?"

No movement at all.

Jian Yao taps his face: "Wake up!"

He responds, his eye brow raised slightly.

- He is going to wake up. Jian Yao thinks to herself.

With his eyes still closed, he raises his hand to grab hers. He then puts it to his lips and gently kisses it.

Jian Yao's whole body stiffens. She is about to pull her hands out from his when she heard his subconscious murmurs: "Chen Mo... go to sleep...."

- Chen Mo?

(Note from TB: the phrase Chen Mo also means silence in Mandarin)

- Is the name of his girlfriend?

Remembering why she is there, she pulls her hand back and shakes his body again.

Bo Jinyan's eyelashes tremble. Finally, he slowly opens his eyes.

"Why are you in my room?"

Her hand is still warm from his kiss. She quickly says: "They found the bodies."

-

Jian Yao went back to her room to get changed. When she returns to the hallway, Bo Jinyan is ready to go, dressed in his suit and tie. Before he starts to walk, he looks to the ground: "Chen Mo, stop blocking the hall."

Jian Yao follows his gaze to the ground. There is a turtle in front of him.

That turtle seems to understand what Bo Jinyan says, and slowly crawls to the side.

Chapter 10

This is a vacant piece of land in the countryside. It is off the beaten track. A pile of old junk sits amongst the trees and overgrown grass.

Bo Jinyan parks his car on the side of a dirt road and walks over.

The police are everywhere. The place has been thoroughly searched. There are pits on the ground. One of them has two policemen standing next to it. Bo Jinyan walks up and sees a huge black plastic bag next to the pit. Further back, there are a few more similar looking bags, where the police are examining the content inside. They look very intense and at the same time, sad.

Jian Yao's heart sinks.

Li walks up to Bo Jinyan: "The dismembered body parts belong to a total of eight boys. Estimated time of death for the most recent body is around one week. We need further testing to determine how long the other bodies have been there, but we think the earliest murder would have occurred more than 12 months ago."

Bo Jinyan nods and starts walking towards the bags.

Jian Yao asks: "Can I stay here?"

Both men look at her at the same time.

Li sees her slightly pale face: "Why don't you wait in the car?"

Bo Jinyan keeps his hands in his coat pocket to keep warm. He bents down slightly and looks at her at 'eye level': "Are you afraid?"

Jian Yao softly replies: "I don't want to see."

Bo Jinyan says mockingly: "Ah! Woman!"

Li is surprised at his comment. Experience tells Jian Yao that there's more to come. Sure enough, she hears his voice that carries no feelings: "What a tragedy."

Jian Yao looks at him: "Whatever. I do not want to see." And she turns away.

Li is a little stunned by the way they relate to each other. He takes a look at Jian Yao and walks on with Bo Jinyan.

-

Bo Jinyan squats on the ground, He is looking through the items in the bag wearing a pair of gloves. Li squats next to him.

The body parts are cut very neatly. The surface of the cuts are tidy. Skins are still intact. Each body is cut into seven pieces, including the limbs and torso.

Li says "According to preliminary forensic test results: The cause of death is asphyxia. There are bruises on their necks, caused by commonly available nylon strings. The body is then cut into pieces. We are unable to determine what tools were used for the dismembering. Other than that, the victims suffer no other injuries."

Another police officer asks: "Professor, you said yesterday that the murderer's desires will be reflected on the bodies. So what does the murderer want?"

Bo Jinyan points to the body parts: "Nothing else was done to them while they were alive or after they died. No sexual assault. No torture or abuse. No blood. No poisoning. He did not take any organ The murderer had only one purpose - to kill and dismember."

Li looked at the corpses. He always thought the teenagers might have suffered from sexual assault before they died. But that weren't the case.

Another policeman asks: "Do you mean... that he abducted those teenager just to kill them? He is not trying to take revenge on society?"

Bo Jinyan smiles: "True psychopaths do not care about the community. They do it because they feel they need to, not to take revenge."

That police is surprised at the answer. Li also raises his eyebrows to look at him.

Bo Jinyan stands up, looks towards the direction of the farmers market: "Since he does not play other tricks, the case is reasonably straight forward. We need to identify what tools he used to dismember the victims, and the method and sequence of how he did it. Once we have that information, we can find the guy. "

-

Jian Yao has waited in the car for quite a while. Bo Jinyan has not returned. A young policeman walks up to her and says" Miss Jian, Professor Bo has left. He asked me to pass on this message to you - Drive back to the villa and wait there."

Jian Yao: "Where did he go?"

The young police replies: "He said he needed to buy something, but he didn't tell us where he was going."

--

Midnight. Jian Yao is awakened by some abnormal noise outside.

She put on her coat and slippers.

The sound is not coming from Bo Jinyan bedroom, but a room she's never been in. It's at the end of the hallway.

She knocks on the door. "Come in."

She can smell blood when she walks in.

The room is fitted with extremely bright lights. The room is very big. There's no ornament on any of the walls.

Bo Jinyan is wearing a medical jumpsuit, complete with surgical masks and cap.

This whole scene reminds her of the movie "Resident Evil".

On top of a rectangular stainless steel table lies a naked man's body. Motionless. Behind him, there are five or six more of these table, each with a body on it.

Bo Jinyan looks at her: "Now that you are awake. Give me a hand."

"What are you doing?" Jian Yao asks.

Bo Jinyan is moving something that resembles a cabinet that is approximately 80cm high, with movable wheels on the bottom. He places it next to the corpse on the table. There are a few blades attached to the side of the cabinet. Jian Yao looks closer at the design. They look like guillotines. He leisurely replies: "Real dead body, human models, computer simulations.... I need to experiment with all of them to determine the tools, processes and methodologies of how the killer mutilated his victims."

Jian Yao asks: "Is there not a forensic room in the headquarters? Why do we need to conduct our own experiments?"

Bo Jinyan adjusts the angles of the blades: "By the time we get approval for a forensic corpse, our murderer will have had his hands on a few more little guys."

Jian Yao points at the body on the table: "..... Where did this come from?"

"Fu Ziyu." He goes around to the other side of the body, turns around and looks at her, "Come. Hold the blade for me."

Jian Yao looks at him for a few seconds: "Sorry, I can't do this. I can help you to call a policeman."

She turns around to walk away. She hears a deep voice from behind: "To investigate a case but refusing to look at the corpse, is like closing your eyes in front of the truth."

Jian Yao pauses for a moment. She decides to walk out.

The low deep voice again: "He may still be alive."

Jian Yao turns and looks at him: "He?"

Jian Yao knows who he is referring to. Lao Xiao's son. The last body found at the scene died a week ago. Lao's son has been missing for only four days.

Jian Yao whispers: "? Do you think you could bring him back?"

Bo Jinyan is still staring at the guillotine. Without looking up, he replies: "I am saving him now."

-

Jian Yao leaves the "morgue". She returns to the bedroom and lies down for a while, She looks outside the window into the deep

darkness. After a deep breath, she washes her face and heads towards where Bo Jinyan is.

Bo Jinyan lifts his eyes. He has a smile on his face - as if he is convinced that she will be back.

Jian Yao put on the "resident evil costume". She walks over to the other side of Bo Jinyan to keep the blades steady, as per his earlier request.

Bo Jinyan: "Keep steady. I am starting the experiment now."

As the blade is speeding down towards the body, Jian Yao closes her eyes. She hears a loud crash. She can imagine how it would look like if her eyes were open.

Bo Jinyan asks: "What are you afraid of? He won't move."

Jian Yao keeps her eyes tightly closed: "Bo Jinyan ! Can you just tell me what I need to do next and say nothing else?"

-

At 3am, all the "experiments" are done.

Bo Jinyan says he needs a few hours for the computer simulation programme to come up with the calculations. Jian Yao immediately takes off her terribly soiled clothes, goes back to the room to bathe.

After her shower, she lies in bed. She stares at the ceiling. It's hard to wipe off the disturbing images that keep emerging in her mind. Even though she had her eyes closed for most of the time during the experiments, there were instances where she inevitably had to open them to complete some tasks.

It's hard to go to sleep. She gets up. She notices the door of one of the rooms is open. The one with the study table and the white board. Light is coming out from that room. She walks in.

Bo Jinyan is sitting on the sofa, reading. There is a cup of coffee and a plate of smoked salmon fillet on the side table. He takes a look at her and continues to read.

She grabs a book from the shelf, sits down beside him and starts reading.

Nobody knows how much time has passed.

"Good night." Bo Jinyan says.

Jian Yao: "Good night."

After he leaves the room, Jian Yao gets out too. Just as she is about to fall asleep in her bed, she hears a loud knock outside the door.

She runs to open the door, but is surprised that no one is there. She hears Bo Jinyan's room door being closed. Puzzled, she closes her door and walks back to bed. But her feet knock onto something. A black object has made its way into her room. "Chen Mo" is crawling slowly towards her bed.

-

When Jian Yao wakes up again, the sun is hanging high in the sky. The warm rays resting on the wooden floor boards. Chen Mo is enjoying the sun bath, heads and limbs stretched out from its shell.

Jian Yao gets out of bed. She kneels down in front of the turtle. She looks at it for a moment and strokes its shell. The shy turtle tucks its head and limbs back into its shell.

The 'morgue' door is open. She knows Bo Jinyan is in there.

By the time Jian Yao comes out of the bathroom, Chen Mo is no longer in her room. It is slowly crawling back to Bo Jinyan's room.

-

Inside the 'morgue', Bo Jinyan is no longer in a jumpsuit. He is in his usual black suit, with his back to her, looking outside the window. The table with the corpse is no longer there.

Bo Jinyan turns to look at her.

Jian Yao: "Thank you for the turtle."

Bo Jinyan smiles. He speaks about something totally unrelated: "He dreamt of being a killing machine."

Then he moves aside. Jian Yao sees what is previously covered by his body that's between him and the window.

It's a modified "guillotine", with three blades all lined up together. Bo Jinyan raises his hand to push down the handle. All three blade came down at once.

Bo Jinyan looks proud.

"According to the experimental data last night" He takes off his gloves, throws them aside: "This thickness, this material, would create a wound that closely resembles the ones we found on the bodies. Yes, three knives falling simultaneously onto frozen blood and body. As you know, no one can use three knives at the same time."

Jian Yao: "So... you mean..?"

"I mean - the killer's home has a machine similar to this. He lures his victim home, so that they will become sacrifices under his killer machine. But of course, his machine will be in all ways inferior to mine."

As if she is infected by the passion in his voice, Jian Yao's heart starts to pound and become excited: "Large blades like these are restricted items. They are only stocked in special stores. You can't buy it over the internet. They are not allowed in long distance buses and trains. If we check with the shops that sell these blades, we should be able to track him down quite easily."

Bo Jinyan sits down next to his killer machine. Picks up a cup of coffee and takes a graceful sip: "You are not too dumb after all. With the intelligence level of our murderer, he would have wasted many blades before he could make a machine that is barely comparable to mine."

"Let's get to work. Inform your boyfriend. I will give them a detailed and accurate description of who they are looking for. Fingers crossed, we will also win back a child."

Chapter 11

8am. Police conference room.

"The murderer is a typical 'organised' criminal. An unorganised criminal usually has mental illness, behavioural disorder, and lack of planning. But our killer is sober, calculative, and has clear set of goals."

He lets young people become victims of his killing machine. He fantasies about controlling life and death. It is not known how he formed his fantasy, but he lives in a city, this is a type of escapism. When you search his house, you might find a lot of violent movies and games.

His attitude is a metamorphosis. He didn't form that personality overnight. He has this fantasy which can't be satisfied in reality. Although he speaks persuasively in front of his victims, he doesn't like socialising. He has no friends. His solitude adds to his psychological problems.

Before he started killing the boys, he would have 'experimented' with stray cats and dogs, or neighbours' pets. Near his house, you might find clues and traces.

Last January, he suddenly began committing crime. Something must have happened to trigger this. For example, a severe setback at work or life. I lean towards problems with his family - deterioration of relationships, death, etc. So he was out of step."

It is a short briefing.

Almost all the police is assigned to be on the case, leaving behind only a few older officers to man the fort.

The conference room becomes empty. Jian Yao packs the presentation materials: "What should we do now?"

Bo Jinyan puts on his coat: "Rest."

Just as they walk out of the station, they see Jian Xuan a few meters away, with a sweet smile: "Sister Great god!!"

Jian Yao smiles at her and asks: "? What are you doing"

Jian Xuan replies: "You did not go home for a few days. Mom has sent me to spy on you."

As they are speaking, Bo Jinyan stands quietly at the corner. Without his mask on, he attracts even more attention from the people on the street because of his good looks.

Jian Xuan is also secretly glancing at him a lot: "Have you had breakfast?"

Jian Yao replies: "Not yet."

Bo Jinyan says to them: "Let's go."

Jian Yao: "I know of a stall nearby that serves excellent fish dumplings."

-

The stall is situated in the alley full of eateries. Business is booming. Smoke curls rising to the air from the the big pot which the stock is boiling away.

The three of them sits at a corner table. The young waitress' usual cool and spicy voice has become somewhat polite and sweet today. Looking at Bo Jinyan: "Can I take your order?"

— — —

Breakfast is served. The sisters chat while they are eating. Bo Jinyan just concentrates on eating . He has no interest in small talk.

Jian Yao notices his bowl is empty. And he has a satisfying smile on his face.

Jian Yao asks: "Would you like another bowl?"

Bo Jinyan: "Yes please."

After two bowls of dumplings, he elegantly wipes his mouth with a serviette. He sits up, and drinks the bottle of mineral water Jian Yao bought him.

Jian Xuan types message with her mobile phone. She passes it to Jian Yao: "Sis, do you think this dress is pretty?"

Jian Yao takes a look at the text: "Wow, I didn't realise Great god has such a big appetite!"

Jian Yao passes the phone back to her and says: "Your taste has always been good."

Jian Xuan puts the phone away. She asks Bo Jinyan: "Great god, can I ask you a question?"

Bo Jinyan: "Go ahead."

Jian xuan: "Almost one year ago, I passed through your house once. I saw a very thin man. I mean VERY thin. He looks a bit scary. Who is that?"

He answers in a calm voice: "That's me."

-

After breakfast, Bo Jinyan returns to the villa by himself. The sisters go home. Jian Yao is looking forward to a nice hot shower.

When she gets out of the bathroom, she finds her sister lying in her bed. Jian Yao lies next to her and closes her eyes.

Jian Xuan turns and looks at her: "Sister"

Jian Yao: "Huh?"

"Do you think" Jian Xuan asks carefully "...Is Bo Jinyan on drugs?"

Jian Yao opens her eyes: "Maybe he's just unwell. Serious illness."

Jian Xuan said: "It is much more than just 'serious illness'. You weren't here. He was really skinny. Although I have a great deal of respect for great god, but only a drug addict has that sort of look. Think about it! He is a genius that deals with murderers. He lives alone. He must be very lonely. He has a face of a playboy. Perhaps he has a secret corrupted side to him."

Jian Yao hears Jian Xuan say: "Sis, you better keep a distance with him. Be careful."

Jian Xuan looks concerned. In Jian Yao's mind, the handsome and arrogant face flashes before her.

Jian Xuan is right. He is not a usual, ordinary guy. He's lonely, kinda alternative... Perhaps everyone in this town thinks that they are in a different world to his. But this is because they don't know him, including Jian Xuan. If they ever see him walking around barefooted in his PJs, or holding his pet turtle, perhaps they won't feel that he is as mysterious and far away as they imagine him to be.

Jian Yao doesn't deny Jian Xuan's speculations: "When we meet someone, we have to trust our instincts too and not over complicate things.

In my life, I will encounter a lot of people. I know that he is one in a million. Sure, he is a little odd, but I can sense that he is a brilliant person - not just because of his looks, but how his mind works. I am saving lives with him right now. This is a once in a life time experience. I feel good about it. Although it is only for a few days. I find it very meaningful. And that's enough."

Jian Xuan looks at her calm and gentle face. She nods.

-

The next morning, Jian Yao goes to the villa.

They have not heard anything from the police. So naturally, there's nothing to do. She wonders if Bo Jinyan is still sleeping.

She switches on the computer, to finish off the final bits of the translation she is doing for him.

— —

A large hand presses down the laptop screen: "You have other work to do."

Thinking that there's an update to the case, Jian Yao quickly asks: "What is it?"

Bo Jinyan: "There's no more fish."

Jian Yao: "..... Oh."

She opens the refrigerator door. Sure enough, zero inventory.

Jian Yao says to Bo Jinyan, who is drinking a glass of milk: "Do you want me to teach you how to fish today? From choosing bait to tips for pulling the pole. Then you can look after yourself from now on..."

"Impossible." Bo Jinyan interrupts her, "I do not like fishing, and how could I waste my time on something like that?"

Jian Yao: "..... Before I return to B city, I will find a fisherman that lives nearby so that he can send you fish whenever you want."

Jian Yao expects him to agree. But he answers: "No. Go fishing."

— —

Under the winter sun, Jian Yao walks alone by the waterside, to replenish Bo Jinyan's depleted stock.

- Bo Jinyan probably refused her fishermen proposal because he doesn't like strangers near his house. But she is not too worried for him. There's always FZY.

She is very fond of fishing, and good at it too. Looking at the two creels full of fish, she starts packing up and calls Bo Jinyan: "Please come and carry the creels."

He looks at all the fish Jian Yao caught. His thin lips bent slightly. He gives a rare friendly smile.

They go through the narrow forest path. Jian Yao follows behind him. She remembers what her sister says about him. She speaks out: "Why were you so skinny before? I am just curious. If you don't feel comfortable sharing, it's ok."

Bo Jinyan: "I was sick."

Jian Yao: "Oh, so.. you have recovered from it?"

A typical Bo Jinyan answer: "Nonsense. Of course, or else I would be dead by now."

- It must have been very serious. Subconsciously, she takes a deep breathe. Fortunately, he has recovered.

After a while, Jian Yao asks another question: "How did Chen Mo get his name?"

Bo Jinyan pauses for a moment and replies "I don't know. I didn't name him."

Jian Yao: "Oh." She stops asking.

Bo Jinyan: "My mother. She chose the name." Bo Jinyan added.

Jian Yao senses that this is not a comfortable topic for him. She heard from FZY that his mom died when he was very young. No wonder he's turned out so eccentric. And he has a pet turtle.

Jian Yao also lost his father at an early age. She changes the topic: "How soon do you expect the police to catch the killer?"

Bo Jinyan answers with an arrogant smile: "I don't know. But if they still can't catch the killer by tomorrow, I can only say that they operate at an amazing speed. Amazingly slow."

Chapter 12

The southern winter wind is damp and cold. But winter does not linger for long. It makes its presence known and leaves like a traveller hurrying to its next destination.

A few days till the New Year. The temperature is gradually rising again. As the snow melts, the town looks clean without those greyish white patches on the ground. People are spending more time outdoors. The city seems more lively and vibrant again.

Jian Yao walks slowly. Unlike the crowd, her heart is still heavy and filled with grief.

Bo Jinyan says the killer should be captured by the police today. There are already rumours going around. People are anxious. She sees several people standing outside a shop, chatting.

"I hear he target boys."

"What a bastard. Can the police find him?"

"Can't allow my kids wander by themselves anymore."...

.....

Today, Jian Yao is visiting her stepfather. She's about to enter the house when the phone rings.

It's Li Xunran.

"Jian Yao! We've found the boy!" Li Xunran sounds tired, "He is still alive. We are rushing him to the hospital now. But the killer escaped. We've sent every man we have on a city hunt."

-

Jian Yao jumps onto the first available taxi. She calls Bo Jinyan.

Must be another late night. His voice sounds muffled: "Ah... I will be there immediately. Tell them not to temper with the crime scene."

-

Jian Yao arrives at the farmers market. According to Li, the killer lives in an alley behind the market.

The market usually closes around noon but because of the forthcoming New Year, there are more people than usual at this time of the day. Jian Yao walks to the seafood section. Fresh fish is sold out, so there are less people in this part of the market. She stands beside the fish tanks, waiting for Bo Jinyan to arrive.

The place smells of the salty sea water and blood. She takes a look around. Jian Yao calls Li. He says he'll be there in a few minutes.

— —

The breakthrough was found by the community police. According to them, there is a small hardware shop next to the market. The owner's name is Sun Yong. He fits the description of the killer's profile. They went to his house, but no one answered the door. However, they heard some noise coming from the inside.

The police acted decisively. They broke in and saw a boy tied up in a corner. He was using his body to hit the floor to alert the police.

.....

Li Xunran arrives at the market. The place is still packed. He works his way pass the crowd and heads towards the back entrance. From his peripheral vision, he notices a slim man of medium height, walking towards the back entrance steps. He has one hand in his pants pocket. The man seems to be very nervous. He looks at the ground most of the time, but every now and again, he looks up and checks out what's going on.

Li's police instinct kicks in. While his eyes are closely following every move of this suspicious looking man, he calls his mates nearby for assistance.

The young man suddenly looks back over at Li's direction. Li Xunran pretends to examine the vegetable in front of him. But when he looks up again, the young man is no longer in sight.

Darn it!

Immediately, Li Xunran yells out: "Sun Yong, stop!"

As he has expected, a figure froze, which made him stand out from the crowd. Then he starts to run. Li Xunran runs after him, while yelling to the crowd: "Out of the way, police at work."

But the place is packed, both of their paths are blocked by people at times. Sun Yong pulls out a dagger from his trouser pockets and starts waving it around. The frightened pedestrians quickly moved out of his way.

Sun Yong runs towards the side entrance, which is next to the seafood section.

Everyone has moved aside, standing at a distance observing what's happening. None of the people dares to stop Sun Yong. He is getting closer and closer to the door. .

-

From the corner of his eyes, Li Xunran notices a person standing by the fish tank. That person did not move away like the rest of the crowd.

Jian Yao sees Sun Yong running towards her direction. Some people are yelling out to her: "Stand back! Stand back! The police are trying to arrest the person." Not far behind, she sees Li Xunran trying to catch up to Sun Yong.

Jian Yao looks at Sun Yong. He is the guy described by Bo Jinyan. She suddenly remembers all the experiments she did with the blades, cutting up the corpse and the human models. This is the man. He killed and dismembered those teenagers.

.....

"Yao yao, don't listen to your mother. Of course policemen get tired, but we can still catch the bad guys. Daddy loves his job."

.....

Jian Yao looks up. Not far from the entrance comes a man in his black suit and jacket. He is wearing a hat and a mask.

But she is too busy to greet him. She picks up a wooden stick next to a pillar. The stick is usually used by the fishmonger to hit the fish unconscious. She clenches the stick, stands next to the glass tank and waits.

"Girl! What are you doing?" Concerned shoppers behind her shout out.

"She is so brave! She is going to help catch the guy."

Jian Yao waits until Sun is coming closer. He's almost parallel to the fish tanks. She uses all her strength to break the glass.

A loud 'bang'.

Water came gushing out from a large tank that's about one metre high. Broken glass, fishes, oxygen pump and lots of water rush towards Sun Yong. He uses his hand to block most of it. But the floor is very slippery. He skids and falls to the ground.

But he only stayed down for a few seconds. He struggles up again. He looks at Jian Yao angrily.

Someone takes the wooden stick from Jian Yao's hand from behind.

She looks up to see a familiar tall figure. He walks towards Sun Yong.

The next scene took Jian Yao completely by surprise. Bo Jinyan, looking prim and proper in a suit, calmly raises the stick and hit Sun Yong in the back of the neck.

Sun Yong falls unconscious to the ground.

Bo Jinyan throws the stick to the ground. He takes out a handkerchief from his pocket and wipes his hand.

Li catches up. He crouches beside Sun Yong to briefly examine him. He looks up at Bo Jinyan: " Why did you knock him unconscious?"

Bo Jinyan: "What? Do you expect me to overpower him with my own strength and pin him to the ground like a police officer?"

Li Xunran turns around and looks at Jian Yao: "Well done!"

Bo Jinyan also turns to look at her: "Why didn't you just hit him directly? With the speed he was going, even a gentle wave with stick is enough to knock him out."

Jian Yao takes a glance at Bo Jinyan - She has never scolded anyone before, let alone hitting. She does not have the nerves to confront him head on.

-

Sun Yong is taken to the police station for interrogation. The alley near Sun Yong's house is surrounded by police cars and police officers. Bo Jinyan and Jian Yao walks through the blockade into Sun Yong's property.

Then Jian Yao stops: "Wait a minute."

She walks over to Li's car and takes out a first aid kit.

There are two small pieces of broken glass stuck in her right hand. They are not serious cuts, but they're still painful. She stands near the vehicle, pulls out the pieces of glass and coat the wound with a layer of iodine.

While she is doing this, Bo Jinyan stands waiting with his hands in his pocket.

She reaches out to him, then hands him the Band-Aid: "Help."

Bo Jinyan takes his hands out of his pockets reluctantly.

Even though he's not the patience and caring type, his touch is soft and gentle. Facing her, he holds her wrists. Her hand is on top of his wrist. She rests her fingers on his arm. He feels the cold skin of her fingers...

"Don't tickle me." He suddenly whispers a sentence.

Jian Yao is taken by surprise: "Ah? I didn't tickle you."

Bo Jinyan raises his dark looks to look at her. He lets go of her hand: "Come on, let's not waste anymore time."

Jian Yao looks that the smooth Band-Aid on her hand.

-

Sun Yong's house is a single storey dwelling. The place is damp and dark, with old and outdated furnishings. The forensics team has completed what they needed to do.

Earlier, a young community police arrived on the scene and found that everything in the house is as described by Bo Jinyan - the killing machine, violent videos and books, eroded bloody blades...

They walk up to the killing machine. As Bo Jinyan has predicted, the machine is very rough compared to the one Bo Jinyan assembled. The blades, though, looks sharp and deadly.

Jian Yao is about to take some pictures with her camera. Bo Jinyan takes off his coat, and lies down beneath the blades on the killing machine.

Jian Yao: "What are you doing?"

He closes his eyes: "To feel..."

Jian Yao is speechless. She takes a few pictures and passes the camera to Bo Jinyan.

He gets up, and smiles at her. His slender eyes shining like a star.

He reaches his arms to grab Jian Yao's wrist. Jian Yao's heart jumps because of this unexpected move: "What are you doing now?"

He pulls her closer towards him.

He replies with a straight voice: "Obviously I'm too big. You are about the same size as the victims. You lie down here so that I can take a look.

Jian Yao breaks away from him.

Just as she is about to protest, the young community police comes over to Bo Jinyan: "Professor, I also found some words scribbled in blood underneath the bed."

Bo Jinyan takes a look. It looks like a set of random numbers.

Bo Jinyan asks: "Anywhere else?"

One of the police officers replies: "We will do a thorough inspection of the entire house."

Bo Jinyan nods: "Let me know once you have done the search."

Jian Yao thinks to herself. Bo Jinyan mentioned before that Sun Yong dreams of being a killer machine. Perhaps these numbers are part of his fantasies.

-

Two days later.

They just received a call from the detention centre. Sun Yong developed a high fever while in custody. He died this morning. Apparently, he's suffering for some serious illness all this time.

His sins, his fantasies, his killing machine, those mysterious figures. These are all things of the past now.

Bo Jinyan Interviews the survivor. His statement added more questions to the case. He told the police he has been begging Sun Yong not to kill him. And strangely enough, Sun Yong obliged. There was once he was put under the killing machine. Out of desperation, he told Sun Yong: "Sir, if you don't kill me, I will take care of you like you are my father. When you die of old age, I will be your son to organise your funeral." And it is this statement that saved him from the blades.

Everything is back to normal, but this case will leave a scar in this little town that is usually peaceful and quiet.

The case has officially closed. Jian Yao's job as Bo Jinyan's assistant has come to an end.

Chapter 13

Bo Jinyan wakes up at 10 o'clock every morning. Not earlier, not later. As usual, he gets out of bed and gets ready for a new day.

He is wearing a grey colour long-sleeved cotton PJs. Again, walking around barefooted. He actually does not like wearing shoes.

(then more descriptions about how nice his feet is?! and his perfect body proportions, and his fair complexion and handsome facial features. Ok, we get it. Every part of his body is perfect...)

— — —

The first ten minutes after he wakes up, he is still in his "sleepwalking" mode. He stands in front of the mirror, squeezes the tooth paste on his toothbrush and starts brushing. The usual morning routine. The numbers found under Sun Yong's bed surfaces to his mind. He still has no idea what those numbers mean.

Coffee, toast, jam. He has the same food for breakfast every day. This is because he doesn't like wasting his time on preparing food. But as he bites into his toast, he can't help but remember the fish dumplings Jian Yao brought him to eat. Maybe he should learn how to cook that dish. He likes it so much he is prepared to 'waste' more of this time on it.

After breakfast. He gets changed and starts work. He goes through some case files sent to him from the US. His phone beeps. It's Fu Ziyu: "Hi."

Fu Ziyu senses from his greetings that he is in a good mood: "I heard that you solved the 'killing machine' case?"

"Of course." Bo Jinyan smiles : "A simple textbook case, except there's still some loose ends to tidy up."

Fu Ziyu is impressed: "No wonder you are so highly regarded amongst the FBI. Mr. Criminal Psychology Professor / Detective."

"..... Jian Yao." Fu Ziyu continues. "Are you giving her the same pay as the assistants you employed in the US?"

"Ah, up to you. You can decide for me." Bo Jinyan is studying a homicide file at the same time.

Fu Ziyu says: "Ok. I am also looking for a new assistant for you from the university. Preferably a graduate from school of psychology. I wonder if I can find someone that specialises in criminal psychology...."

Bo Jinyan stops what he is doing.

"Wait." He cuts off Fu Ziyu sentence: "Why do you want to replace Jian Yao?"

Fu Ziyu laughs: "..... I want to replace her? Come on, Professor Bo. Are you out of your mind? Or am I missing something here. She is a language student. She does not have the qualifications required for the post. She helped you for this one of case because it was urgent and we had no time to look for anyone else. Besides, she is graduating soon, and will be moving to B City. She has accepted a job offer there already."

Bo Jinyan thinks for a moment. His tone is somewhat contemptuous "Obviously you are the one with the problem. She has gained experience from working with me on this serial killer case. And she can fish. I don't want to change to a different assistant. As for her work, just ask her to breach the contract. How can a common tedious boring office job compare with my assistant position? She will make the right choice."

-

Late afternoon. In a coffee shop in town.

Jian Yao and Li Xunran are sitting by the window. Even though there's only three days till the New Year, neither of them has the usual excitement that comes with this festive season.

It's been a while since they are able to catch up with one another. Li Xunran has been very busy.

Jian Yao puts a spoon of sugar into her coffee and stirs it around: "Is the work on Sun Yong's case finished?"

Li Xunran lights a cigarette: "Yeah. This guy died too easily. Ten lives..."

Both are silent for a moment. Jian Yao asks: "Has anyone cracked those numbers yet?"

Li Xunran shakes his head: "Not really. Since Sun Yong has mental problems, these figures are likely to be casually written after his fantasy. They probably have no specific meaning."

Jian Yao nods.

They chat for a while. Li Xunran asks: "When are you heading back to the university?"

"Fifteen January." Jian Yao replies, "Then I will start my internship in a company in B city."

Li Xunran smiles: "Let's celebrate. Order a bottle of wine. You worked as Bo Jinyan's assistant and helped solved a difficult case. Your dad would have been proud of you."

Jian Yao thinks about her father.

- Yes, he would have been proud of me.

— — —

After dinner Jian Yao goes to the villa. Every time she tries to finish off the last bit of the translation, there's some sort of interruption. She is determined to get it done today.

After she is done, Jian Yao walks upstairs to that first room with the whiteboard. Bo Jinyan is sitting on the sofa reading.

Dark shiny hair. Symmetrical facial features. His signature black suit.

- He's a lot more attractive when he's not talking. Thought Jian Yao.

Bo Jinyan raises his eyebrows slightly, then goes back to read his book.

Jian Yao turns around. The whiteboard has some numbers on it.

"145,297,289,121

17,324,1

25, 484

365,729,16

421,27,841

29,1

136,729,16 "

These are the numbers found in Sun Yong house.

There were more than one group of numbers - mattress, floors, window frames, ceiling some were hiding in places not easily found. They were all scribbled by Sun Yong with his own blood.

Jian Yao studies them for a moment and goes over to sit down next to Bo Jinyan: "I've finished translating the file for you. Is there anything else you want me to do?"

Bo Jinyan lifts his eye from the books to look at her: "No."

"Fish? I can go fishing."

"That's not urgent."

Presumably, the refrigerator has not been emptied out yet.

She sees all the documents scatters around the room. He must be busy. She stands up: "Ok. I am leaving now. Keep in touch. Goodbye."

Bo Jinyan looks up: "You can continue to work for me."

Bo Jinyan find a document from the table and passes it to her.

"This is a contract Fu Ziyu drafted. You will find that the terms are extremely good for someone with your level of experience." He goes back to reading his files again.

Jian Yao is surprised. It's an employment contract for a duration of three years. The terms and pay are similar to her previous contract, except for one additional term - to take care of Bo Jinyan's diet. She assumes this means fishing. The pay is much better than she expects.

This is like an endorsement from Bo Jinyan. Jian Yao is extremely pleased.

“Just sign on the bottom of the document and fax it to Fu Ziyu, he will organise the rest.”

Grateful and touched by his offer, Jian Yao says: "Thank you Bo Jinyan. I really did not expect this. Thank you for thinking so highly of me. But I have accepted a position with a company in B city. The internship starts after the New Year holidays. I am sorry, but I can't accept this job."

Bo Jinyan puts his cup of coffee on the table.

Jian Yao smiles at him.

Bo Jinyan smiles back: “Fu Ziyu says woman likes to worry about irrelevant things. Looks like he is right again. You can breach their contract. I will pay for any compensation required.”

She never thought about a career in the criminal investigation. It's alright to do it for a few days, but to continually be in that sort of harsh environment is a different story. She still prefers a calm and stable life.

"I do not intend to breach the contract. This is my first job, I cannot lose my integrity. Besides, I have no desire to pursue a career in your field. But thank you so much for the offer."

— — —

That night, Fu Ziyu calls Bo Jinyan: “Hey, no sign of the signed contract yet. Did you forget to send it to me?”

Bo Jinyan: “How can you expect me to remember such trivial things?”

Fu Ziyu: “But... isn't she heading back to school soon?”

Bo Jinyan: “Maybe.”

Fu Ziyu is getting a little agitated: "You were the one who insisted I had to have the contract ready for you by today. You said it's a no brainer and she will sign it straight away. I spent hours on it last night..."

Then he pauses..."Wait a minute... Did she decline your job offer?"

"Click~!"

"Hello... Hey, how dare you hang up on me, Bo Jinyan..."

Chapter 14

Every household is busy preparing for the New Year celebrations. The streets are filled with people who are rushing around, running errands and getting their last minute shopping done. Everyone is looking forward to the family reunion dinner on the last day of the year.

Jian Yao's mother is a typical, traditional mom, and a very diligent one. There's a lot of cooking and cleaning to be done before New Year's eve. Together with Jian Yao and Jian Xian, the three of them worked hard for three whole days. Finally, everything is ready.

New Year's Eve.

Since the first firecracker was set off in dawn, the sound of these little explosions has not stopped. You can hear it all around the city. And it will keep going until late in the night. After lunch, the family goes to visit Jian Yao's grandmother.

The extended family gathers. The adults sit around to chat and enjoy a drink or two. The energetic children playing the backyard. After

dinner, Jian Yao and Jian Xian escape the crowd. They hide in Grandma's room and play with their smart phones.

New year blessing texts clog Jian Yao's inbox. She scrolls down the list and notices one from Fu Ziyu: "To the mighty Ms Jian, please allow me to send my greetings and blessings to you on this special day - May you become more beautiful each day. "

- Mighty? Interesting choice of adjective.

Jian Yao smiles and responds to his text. She hesitates, then she sends Bo Jinyan a simple "Happy New Year' message too.

The sky is dark. The sound and sight of fire crackers fill the town. Dazzling displays bursting in the sky.

- I wonder how Bo Jinyan is spending his New Year's eve. Jian Yao thinks to herself. Will he spend it like any other day? Eating his fish quietly, accompanied by Chen Mo. is Fu Ziyu with him? But surely, Fu Ziyu needs to spend tonight with his own family.

The phone rings. It's Bo Jinyan.

They have not been in contact since Jian Yao declined the assistant position. Jian Yao picks up the call: "Hello. Happy new year."

Bo Jinyan asks: "What are you doing?"

Jian Yao is baffled: "Uh... Nothing much."

Bo Jinyan: "Then do you want to come over and collect some fireworks? They are of no use to me."

It must be a gift. He is not the type to spend money on fireworks. From Fu Ziyu? The police?

Jian Yao smiles and says:. "No thank you. You can enjoy them yourself."

Bo Jinyan says coldly: "I have no interest in a bunch of solid that creates foul smell and bright patterns."

Jian Yao: "..... Well, my sister and I will come around soon."

-

Before receiving Jian Yao's text, Bo Jinyan was sitting in front of a warm fireplace, wrapped in a thick blanket, reading a book. The TV is turned on, but he is not watching it.

After he put down the phone, he threw a blanket aside and walked to the storage room. He took out two full boxes of firework. They were gifts from Fu Ziyu, Tong City Police Department, Ministry of Public Security Office He left them next to the front door.

-

Jian Yao borrows a car from one of her uncles and drives to his house. As they are driving towards Bo Jinyan's house. they can see a lot of people standing on either side of the river with their fireworks. The water in the river reflects the colourful fluorescent rays from the displays.

Bo Jinyan steps inside his house and see the amount of fireworks on the floor.

Jian Yao: "That's too much for us..."

Bo Jinyan: "If you don't take it away, I will throw it into the rubbish bin tomorrow."

Jian Xian quickly opposes: "That's too good to be wasted. And it's not safe to dispose of firework that way. Sis, we've got to take them all."

Jian Yao looks at Bo Jinyan and asks tentatively: "Can you help us to move it down to the riverbank?"

-

More and more people gather around the riverbank.

The two sisters are carrying a box in front. Bo Jinyan is holding a box walking behind them. Jian Yao is a little surprised that he is willing to help.

The firework Bo Jinyan gave them are premium quality. Before long, they have attracted a lot of attention, especially young children. Jian Yao notices that Bo Jinyan has put on his mask, leaving only a pair of slender black eyes to be seen.

The little children are in awe. They are clapping their hands and exclaiming: "Too beautiful!" "Wow, this is so cool!"

Jian Yao notices Bo Jinyan is raising his eyebrows. It's sign that he is about to make a comment.

Before he utters anything, Jian Yao says to him "Please. Don't say anything."

Whatever he will say is likely to destroy the atmosphere.

Bo Jinyan turns to look at her and keeps quiet.

-

Soon, they've grown from a group of three to almost twenty people playing fireworks together.

One of the boys proposes to line up rows of fireworks and set them off simultaneously. Everyone agrees that it's a good idea. He takes a bunch of fireworks and arranges them in several rows. A boy standing next to Jian Yao asks her: "Your friend is so 'cool'. Why is he standing so far away? Is he afraid?" Everyone laughs.

Jian Yao smiles and turns around to look at Bo Jinyan: "Bo Jinyan, can you come and help light a few fireworks?"

-

Twenty fireworks to be lighted up by five people. Timing is key. Everyone has to light them together. Jian Yao and three others start to light the fuses and angles their bodies so they can run away immediately after they are done.

But Bo Jinyan is taking his own sweet time. He squats before the fireworks, one hand resting on his knee. Slowly he lights each fuse one by one with the cigarette lighter that is in his other hand.

"Can you please hurry up?!" Jian Yao urges him as they squat down together.

He lifts his eye to look at her: "Are you nervous?"

All the fuses are lighted. Jian Yao and the others runs away from the fireworks.

Within a few seconds, the fireworks start to explode. Bo Jinyan is still amongst the fireworks. He slowly emerges from the smoke and light.

He goes up to Jian Yao: "All done."

Jian Yao's attention is on the fireworks display. She casually answers:
"Thank you for your help."

Jian Yao suddenly remembers something. She turns around and finds Bo Jinyan walking towards the little kid that commented he was afraid earlier. As Jian Yao gets closer, she hears him say: "Hey kid. Do you think I am afraid of these mixtures of sulphur, charcoal powder and potassium nitrate? in fact, I've dismantled a bomb that is a hundred times the impact of these pathetic toys before..."

Jian Yao pulls him away, while apologising to the parents: "I'm sorry. Please ignore him...."

-

In less than half an hour, all the fireworks are gone. Jian Yao's mother calls to urge the girls to go home soon. So they pack up the rubbish and get ready to go home.

Jian Yao turns to Bo Jinyan: "Thanks for the firework. We need to go."

Jian Xian: "Thank you, thank you!"

Bo Jinyan: "Don't mention it. Bye. " He turns to the direction of the villa and walks away.

As he disappears, Jian Xian sighs: "Sister. It's New Year's Eve, and he is all alone. I feel sorry for him."

Jian Yao looks in his direction for a moment, and smiles: ". Believe me, he does not feel sorry for himself. He probably thinks that tonight was noisy and boring"

-

Time flies when one is having fun. Jian Yao spends the New Year holidays visiting friends and relatives. She has not seen Bo Jinyan since New Years' Eve.

It is only a few days till she returns to the university.

That afternoon, some unexpected guests came to visit Jian Yao. It's the security guard Lao Xiao and his son.

They have come to express their gratitude to Jian Yao.

Lao Xiao gives her several packages. They are all produces from his garden. Jian Yao politely declines but Lao Xiao insists she must accept it as a token of their appreciation. She finally accepts their gifts. Jian Yao's mom invites them to stay for dinner.

Jian Yao's mother is busy cooking in the kitchen. Jian Xian is playing a board games with the son in her room. Jian Yao, her stepfather and Lao Xiao is chatting in the lounge. "We owe it all to Professor Bo. I heard from the police, he's like a fortune-teller, the bastard is exactly as he had described!"

Lao Xiao tells Jian Yao what happened yesterday. They paid Bo Jinyan a visit. They brought the same presents they gave to Jian Yao today. But Bo Jinyan didn't invite them into his villa. In fact, he didn't even open the door for them. He simply talked to them from the inside of the house: "Thank you. I don't need the gift. Goodbye." And when they insisted, he added: "Please don't bother me anymore."

.....

Lao Xiao sigh: "All I wanted is to thank him for saving my child's life. I don't know how to repay his kindness..."

Jian Yao's stepfather, Mr.Xie, says to him: "You do not have to worry. A lot of experts are somewhat eccentric..."

Jian Yao nods.

Jian Yao's mother walks out from the kitchen: "Jian Yao, Professor Bo lives alone, right? How about inviting him over for dinner tonight?"

Jian Yao: "I'll try. Mom, can you please add a steamed fish to tonight's menu?"

-

Jian Yao didn't expect Fu Ziyu to answer the phone. Obviously, he has come to visit Bo Jinyan.

Fu Ziyu: "He's shut himself inside a room the whole day. I am not sure what he is up to. He didn't take his phone with him.... go over to your house for dinner? You are so nice.... Sure... Don't worry, I'll drag him out of his cave."

-

They arrive. Fu Ziyu is carrying a bottle of red wine and a box of lanterns. Bo Jinyan follows behind him, wearing his usual black suit.

Jian Yao's parents are slightly stunned when they met the legendary Professor Bo. Perhaps they didn't think he would be so young.

Everyone is seated.

Fu Ziyu is a friendly and social character: "Auntie, Uncle, Lao Xiao (Xiao Senior), Xiao Xiao (Xiao Junior) !!" He greets everyone as if they are long lost friends. In contrast, Bo Jinyan is reserved and quiet. He just nods and says Hello.

As the head of the family, Mr. Xie speaks first: "We have heard a lot about you. My friend says it's not easy to become a professor in

America. You have done well to achieve an associate professor status at your age."

Bo Jinyan says in a flat voice: "In fact, I am good enough for professor level and above, but they refused my application because I am too young."

Mr. Xie: "..... Oh, yes, you are more qualified than we thought!"

Bo Jinyan smiles: "Thank you."

Fu Ziyu gives Jian Yao a "I knew this would happen" look. Jian Yao smiles.

After a while, Lao Xiao takes his son, holds up a glass of wine. He stands and faces Bo Jinyan. With tears in his eyes, he says: " Professor Bo, We will never forget what you have done for us. Thank you for saving my son."

Bo Jinyan replies: "I am just doing my job. It's nothing personal. You don't have to thank me."

Jian Yao immediately reaches for his glass and shoves it into his hand. Fu Ziyu adds: "Bo Jinyan is so modest. He doesn't want you to feel that you owe him anything..."

.....

Fu Ziyu is clearly a master at changing the mood. He casually leads the conversation to a different topic, such as Jian Yao's new work.

"Yes, I will start after the New Year holidays. " Jian Yao smiles. She is very much looking forward to it. It is her first proper full time job. it's a new chapter in her life.

Like all mothers, Jian Yao's mom is a little concerned for her daughter: "We are not going to be close by to you when you are in B city. You have to be careful. Have you found a flat yet?"

When Fu Ziyu hears this, he raises his eyebrows: "You are looking for a flat? I'm helping Bo Jinyan to find a place in B city, so I can look out for you too." He looks at Jian Yao's mom: "I've checked out a few flats already. They are in a good and safe suburb, close to the city centre. Any one of them will suit you quite well."

Jian Yao looks at Bo Jinyan. He is also going to B City?

As if he's aware of her doubts, Bo Jinyan says to her: "I'll be working there."

Jian Yao's mom and step father is very pleased with Fu Ziyu's offer: "Thank you so much for taking care of our Yao Yao."

Fu Ziyu waves his hand: "Leave it to me. I'll make sure she finds a nice place."

Jian Yao is not so sure about this: "Mom, it's too much hassle for Mr. Fu."

"Just let him help you." Bo Jinyan interrupts her. "Looking after people is like a hobby to him."

Jian Yao: "..... oh."

-

The meal ended around nine o'clock. Lao Xiao probably had a little too much to drink. His son had to hold on to him when they left. Shortly after Lao Xiao left, Fu Ziyu and Bo Jinyan went home.

Jian Yao is washing the dishes in the kitchen. Her mom is humming away.

Jian Yao: " Mom, you are in a good mood."

Mother looks at her: "Yao Yao, I think Fu Ziyu is a good man."

- No wonder she encouraged Fu Ziyu to look for a flat for her. It's not in her character to trouble others or ask for favours. Jian Yao laughs: "Mom. There is nothing between us. We are just friends."

"I know, but you are twenty two years old already, it's okay to have a boyfriend. Just be friends first. All relationships start with friendship."

Jian Yao: "Mom...."

Mom continues: "Fu Ziyu is a doctor. He is friendly, charming, responsible and considerate. It's hard to find good bachelors like him these days..."

Jian Yao asks: "What about Bo Jinyan? I mean, they came together. Why are you not 'selling' him to me?"

Her mother pauses and answers: "He is quite a nice young man too. But he is a forensic expert. He deals with brutal criminals and psychopaths. It's a high risk profession. I was worried for you when you assisted him with the kidnapping case. All parents are selfish when it comes to the safety of their children. I would rather you be with someone not belonging in the field of law and order."

Jian Yao understands where her mother is coming from. Losing a husband when she was young is not an experience she wishes her daughter will have to go through too.

-

On the road back to the villa. They are walking along the riverbank. Bo Jinyan is strolling leisurely with his hands in his pants pockets.

Fu Ziyu's face is slightly red, probably from all the wine he had tonight. He tells Bo Jinyan : " I think Jian Yao's mom likes me. She wants me as her son-in-law."

Bo Jinyan takes a glance at him.

Fu Ziyu sighs and shakes his head: "Unfortunately, Jian Yao is not my cup of tea. I don't like girls that's so.... mature."

"Impossible." Bo Jinyan says to his friend.

Fu Ziyu knows him too well. What Bo Jinyan means is that "I am taller, smarter, more handsome, and earns more money than you., there is no way Jian Yao's mother would fancy you over me. This defies basic logic."

He nods: "You have a point, my superior friend. Hey, I have something to show you.." He pulls out a folded document from his overcoat pocket.

"When you mentioned you would like to hire Jian Yao to be your assistant, I did the standard background check on her, in accordance with the routine procedures. This is what I found."

Bo Jinyan takes the piece of paper and reads it quickly. Fu Ziyu: "Why do you think I offer to help find a flat for her. I feel a bit sorry for her. Her father died when she was six years old. He is the crime investigation vice-captain. He caught a gang leader and sent him to prison. When the gang leader was released, he took revenge. He went to his house. She and her sister were in the bedroom at the time. The father locked the door so that the gang members were able to get in and

harm the two girls. The police came in time to rescue the girls, but Jian Yao's grandparents and her father were already dead."

(Note from TB: The author sometimes includes a short story at the end of the chapter...)

New Year's Day. Fu Ziyu calls Bo Jinyan.

"Happy new year! How was New Year's Eve?"

"Normal."

"Uh What is that suppose to mean?"

"I used up the fireworks you gave me."

Fu Ziyu is shocked: "With whom?"

"Jian Yao, Jian Xian, and a bunch of people that I do not know."

Fu Ziyu can't believe what he is hearing.

Bo Jinyan: "It's better than staying home to watch the TV. There's nothing worth watching."

- Yeah, whatever you say, Mr. Bo. Fu Ziyu thinks to himself.

Chapter 15

Winter makes way for spring.

The trees that lost their leaves over winter are starting to grow new leaves again. These Ginkgo trees line either side of the road leading to the university dormitory block for the girls. Underneath the trees, students are standing in groups, catching up with one another about what happened during the holidays. There are also couples in the more secluded spots, cuddling and displaying their affection for each other. After, the romantic spring season has arrived.

Jian Yao's roommates have not returned to the campus, so she has the room all to herself. She spends her day reading, surfing the net and recording the details of working with Bo Jinyan on a journal. It was a one in a lifetime experience. She wants to keep a note of everything that has happened.

— — —

Jian Yao is lying in bed when Fu Ziyu calls.

"Your voice sounds funny. Are you ok? Do you have a toothache? Or is your face swollen because someone hit you?" asks Fu Ziyu.

Jian Yao tries not to laugh. She has a whitening mask on her face. It's hard to talk when you don't want to open your mouth.

"Mask! What's up?" She answers.

Fu Ziyu is amused. He turns to Bo Jinyan and says: "Hey Bo Jinyan, she sounds like a sheep. It's kinda whiny but it's cute. Do you want to listen to it?"

Bo Jinyan answers : "Why would I want to hear her distorted voice?"

By this time, Jian Yao has removed the thin piece of sheet from her face:
“Hey, I didn’t answer the phone to get mocked.”

Fu Ziyu laughs and tells her the reason for the call: “Let’s have lunch together. I’ve found a flat for you.”

“I’ll treat you. Come over to the campus. There’s a restaurant nearby that does a nice fish dish.”

— — —

There’s a lot of small eateries around the campus. Yao picked a restaurant that does a good lamb and fish casserole. It’s a popular choice amongst the students.

- Does he own suits of any other colour? Jian Yao wonders. At least he looks good in a black suit. Hang on, why should she care what Bo Jinyan wears.

•

They stand at the entrance, waiting for a waiter to show them to their table. Bo Jinyan takes a look around. The place is filled with the smell of chilli, fish and lamb.

“They source their fish from the fish market every morning. It’s guaranteed fresh. And the lamb is from Mongolia.” Jian Yao looks at Bo Jinyan, “Have you tried this before?”

Bo Jinyan take a glance at her. He doesn’t answer her question.

Jian Yao passes the menu to Fu Ziyu: “Is there anything else you want to order?”

Fu Ziyu asks the waiter: “Can we order a steamed fish as well?”

“Sorry, we specialises in lamb and fish casserole. The kitchen prepares the food in the morning. We don’t have any whole fish fillets left. The portions are quite large, it should be more than enough for the three of you.”

It’s a pleasant meal. Jian Yao and Fu Ziyu did most of the talking. Bo Jinyan will add a sentence or two occasionally, but it’s always in his arrogant and inconsiderate manner. They are used to his style by now, so they just laugh it off. When Bo Jinyan leaves the table to take a phone call outside, Fu Ziyu says jokingly to Jian Yao: “What’s wrong with us? Why are we friends with Bo Jinyan? Do we like to bring torture upon ourselves?”

- A Friend?! Bo Jinyan? Jian Yao thinks to herself. They are friends now.

— —

Jian Yao notices that Bo Jinyan did not touch the fish and lamb casserole. He didn’t eat from the beef dish either.

Jian Yao: “Why...?”

“He doesn’t eat red meat.” Fu Ziyu knows what she is about to ask: “He was on a six months cannibal hunt in California a couple of years ago. He stopped eating red meat after that case.”

Jian Yao “I’m sorry....”

“Never mind. He also likes vegetables. See, he finished this whole plate by himself!” smiles Fu Ziyu. “ In his line of work, he comes across a lot of very disturbing sights at the crime scenes, especially during the time when he assisted the FBI investigation. He is used to them now, but it’s because of accumulated experience. The first time he was at a crime scene, he threw up too.”

— —

After lunch, Fu Ziyu brings them to a beautiful apartment building on a quiet cul de sac.

The three bedrooms apartment Fu Ziyu found for Bo Jinyan is on the first place. It has a very minimalist feel. A palette of neutral and grey colours makes the place cold and uninviting. There is a big 2metres x 2 metres bed in the master bedroom, covered in black bed linen. Bo Jinyan takes a look around and nods: “Yes, I like this place. Thank you.”

“We are going to your apartment next.” says Fu Ziyu to Jian Yao.

“Mine? In the same building?”

“Of course, then you can look out for one another.” Fu Ziyu whispers in her eyes: “I think it’s safer for you to have a male friend living close by.”

Bo Jinyan overhears this statement. He has a smile on his face. Jian Yao is not sure what the significance of this smile. Proud? Pride? What is he proud of anyway? That he’s a man, and not a weak and vulnerable woman?

— — —

“This neighbourhood is probably outside my budget...”

“Take a look inside first before you decide.” Fu Ziyu pushes her into a small studio apartment on the second floor. It’s neatly furnished. A little chandelier hanging from the ceiling adds a nice feminine touch. There’s two small orange sofas in the middle of the room. There’s a tatami bed next to the window. In the other side of the room is a clawed foot bathtub, with soft pink drapes around it. Jian Yao can already imagine how relaxing it will be soaking the tiredness away after a hard day’s work. This place is perfect for her.

"How much is this studio?" She knows it's not going to be cheap but it's worth the extra rent. Fu Ziyu tells her how much the rent is. She makes a quick calculation in her head. "OK! I'll take it."

Bo Jinyan looks around her apartment. He takes a look at the views outside the window: "Wow, you'll never see a sunrise through these windows." It looks into the wall of a tall neighbouring building.

Come on, at the price she is paying, she can't expect a sea view too!

He walks to the clawed foot bathtub. He looks at it for ages, and then uses his fingers to examine the surface. Jian Yao thinks it's weird that a man would stare at her bathtub for such a long time. She walks over and tries to draw him away: "There's nothing special to see here."

"Why are you blushing?" Asks Bo Jinyan.

It's not something Jian Yao expects him to say. She subconsciously touches her face. It's ... a little hot.

"Don't be shy." His eyes flashes her a haughty glance: "Woman feels the need to be naked sometimes. To be freed from the restraints of clothing. You express that when you are alone. It's normal human behaviour."

Jian Yao face is bright red now. But perhaps they have spent enough time together by now. She comes back with her counterattack: "Is this what you read from your psychology books? That's just theories 'on paper', you have no idea how woman actually thinks or behaves."

-

Jian Yao spend the next few days decorating her apartment. She looks forward to her first day of work.

Bo Jinyan has been busy too. He bought a car - a Grand Cherokee. They met each other at the lobby a few times. Apparently, Bo Jinyan works mostly from home. He does not need to go to the office every day.

-

Jian Yao works for a company calls ClearWorld - a well-known international trading company. It's not easy to get an internship there, but her good grades helped her to secure the job.

On Monday morning, Jian Yao takes the subway to work. The company is in a building located near the embassy district, next to all the high-end shopping malls, entertainment and bars.

It is a magnificent building. Everyone is very well-dressed. They all look like they are very busy. The atmosphere here is quite intense. Jian Yao has heard rumours about an employee who died suddenly of fatigue due to over working. There's also a story that a girl committed suicide recently because she can't take the pressure of working here anymore. Jian Yao doesn't know if they are true. But everyone does look like they are in combat mode and ready to 'fight'.

Jian Yao reports to the sector that is responsible for automotive parts. This is one of the smaller divisions within the sales department. To her relieve, her reporting manager is quite nice, and her colleagues are friendly and helpful. They are all around the same age as her, so it's easy to get along with them.

— — —

Weekend.

It's been a week since Jian Yao started work. It's been a busy week. She is happy to relax in her little apartment.

There's a knock on the door. It's a courier package for someone calls Simon.

The courier guy says to Jian Yao: "I called Mr.Bo. He is not home at the moment. He said to leave this package with you."

- Simon? She didn't know he has an English name.

- Simon. It's a nice name. It suits him.

Just before dinner time, there's another knock on the door. It's Bo Jinyan.

They just look at each other. She passes him the parcel. She expects him to leave straight away. But instead, he walks in without an invitation. He starts inspecting the house. Then he takes a seat on the sofa and opens the parcel. It's a document file. He starts going through the file.

Jian Yao leaves him to do his own thing. She goes back to the kitchenette to prepare her dinner.

Chapter 16

The house is so quiet that Jian Yao sometimes forgets that there is someone else sitting on the sofa.

Bo Jin Yan is very focused in what he is reading. Jian Yao pours him a cup of tea. Without even looking up, Bo Jin Yan says: "I don't drink liquid from unknown origins. Replace it with water."

Jian Yao looks at what he calls 'liquid from unknown origins'. It's a combination of lavender and orange blossoms and hibiscus flowers. It's her favourite flower tea.

"If you want water, pour it yourself."

Bo Jin Yan senses her displeasure. He looks up, but she is no longer there.

Jian Yao is cutting vegetables in the kitchenette. But she is listening out for what Bo Jin Yan might do. There is no movement behind her. She turns around and sees Bo Jin Yan holding the cup of tea she gave him. He looks like he is examining some important evidence from a crime scene.

Jian Yao can't help but give a little laugh: "I found this shop in an old alley. A girl that owns this speciality tea shop says they only use organic produces. I have tried all the tea shops in the area. This is the best."

Jian Yao continues cooking. She puts a pot of chicken soup on the table.

The cup Bo Jin Yan is drinking from is empty. Jian Yao smiles. She is about to walk off when she sees Bo Jin Yan stretching out his hand. He taps the top of the coffee table (next to the empty cup) with his long fingers.

Does this means that he wants more tea?

Jian Yao raises an eyebrow and asks: "It's nice huh?!"

Bo Jin Yan smiles without looking out: "Yes, thank you."

Jian Yao thinks about Fu Zi Yu's comments in the restaurant - bringing torture upon themselves. He is right. Why should she bother? She is not his maid. Yet, she is flattered because he approves of her taste in tea.

She gives a small sigh and pours him another cup of tea.

-

For dinner, she has prepared some braised pork, fried lotus root, stir fried green vegetable and soup. She left the pork in its pot and brought out everything else. Is he staying for dinner? She actually never checked. She takes out two bowls of rice.

Given the past comments he made about her cooking, she is ready for his unkind comments. If Bo Jin Yan says: 'I can't possibly eat food of this quality.' She will respond "You have mistaken. Both bowls of rice are for me."

But her 'preparation' is unnecessary. Bo Jin Yan picks up the chopsticks and starts eating.

None of them speaks.

Jian Yao watches him pick up the lotus roots with his chopsticks. He puts it in his mouth. No comment. Then he picks up the bowl of chicken soup, scooped out the chicken pieces to eat with his rice, then the vegetables...

"Even if you keep staring at me, the quality of the food will not magically improve." Bo Jin Yan finally speaks.

She is about to rebuke him when he continues to say: "What's this?" He points at the soft capsules of rice in the white porcelain bowl.

"Jasmine rice from Thailand." Jian Yao answers. "I tried over 20 brands. This is the best."

-

Because the sofa sits quite low to the ground, he has to lean forward whenever he is taking food. She puts down her rice bowl, takes out a pillow from the bed and put it behind his back: "There. You should be more comfortable with this."

She found this pillow after looking at quite a few shopping malls. It has a nice design and is very comfortable. Bo Jin Yan looks at her, then leans against it.

-

Jian Yao just finished washing the dishes when the phone rings. She dries her hands and answers. It's Li Xun Ran.

"What are you doing?" He sounds relaxed.

Jian Yao smiles and answers: "Doing the dishes."

Li Xun Ran: "Did someone come for dinner?"

Jian Yao glances at Bo Jin Yan, who is still sitting on the sofa watching TV: "Yes. Bo Jin Yan."

"Dinner at 9pm? Are you guys dating each other?"

"Of course not." Jian Yao interrupts him, "You and I always dine together. Same deal. Just two friends having a meal together. So why did you call me?"

Li Xun Ran says : "About the words at the crime scene. We have some experts from the provincial office come by. They are trying to decipher them. They have made some progress. Just want to let you and Professor Bo know. "

-

Bo Jin Yan is examining Jian Yao's bed, or to be exact, what's on Jian Yao's bed. On top of her bed, there is a nice silk duvet.

Then he looks at her bedside table. There's a number of beautiful dolls on it, as well as a black paper weight. These are all the results of careful selection after looking through several shopping malls.

"You must have spent hundreds of hours to find decorations for this little space of less than forty square metres."

Jian Yao pours herself a cup of tea: "More than one week." She enjoys the process. Besides, the end results are well worth the time spent.

"You are right." says Bo Jin Yan

Jian Yao: "About what?"

"I don't really understand woman." He obviously agrees with her. "I can't understand why you would spend hundreds of hours just to decorate the place."

Jian Yao: "..... that's none of your business!"

— — — —

After the detailed 'inspection' of her house, Bo Jin Yan finally left.

- Bo Jin Yan ate a whole bowl of rice today. He ate at least half of the vegetables and three bowls of chicken soup. Seems like he enjoyed the meal after all. She smiles and goes to sleep.

— — — —

The next morning, Bo Jin Yan visits again.

This time, it's Jian Yao's turn to be in her long-sleeved cotton PJs. Bo Jin Yan takes a look at her: "You are thinner than I expect. Get changed. Time to go out."

Jian Yao: "Go? Where?"

Bo Jin Yan: "Shopping."

When they are both in his car, he passes Jian Yao a list. She can't believe what's on the shopping list: "You mean - tea, rice, pillow, duvet, paperweights... all those things in my house, you want a set too? You said yesterday that you can't understand why I spent so much time shopping for them! "

"Firstly, we need to buy two sets of each item. I told Fu Zi Yu about them and he wants a set too." He says in a casual voice: " Don't you think it's the perfect outcome? You have done all the boring, inefficient and time consuming work, but all three of us get to share the benefits."

Jian Yao: "Bo Jin Yan! I have never encountered anyone who asks for favours in such an arrogant and condescending manner!!"

— — —

Fu Zi Yu calls to thank Jian Yao. His approach is completely different to Bo Jin Yan's. He's so appreciative of her time and effort, and praises her for good taste. He vows to treat her a nice and expensive meal later.

Bo Jin Yan is sitting beside her when she talks to Fu Zi Yu. When they have finished, he says to her: "I appreciate your taste, but I despise your efficiency. It's two separate issues. It's not contradictory!"

-

When they are on their way to the first shop, Jian Yao asks him: " If you don't want to waste your time shopping, why are you coming with me?"

Bo Jin Yan replies: "Do you think I want to be here? Fu Zi Yu says I must be your driver for the day."

— —

This afternoon, Jian Yao finds out something new about Bo Jin Yan. He is quite loose with money. He never asks about price of things. He just throws his credit card to her and let her deal with it. She collects all the dockets and passes them to him. He just throws them away without looking.

And although he is a picky person, the type of things he is picky about is very selective. He's picky about everything to do with his work. He is picky about what food he eats. But other than that, he seems pretty easy going. Maybe he can't be bothered. it's not worth his time and energy. For example, when she asks him what colour and style of pillow does he want, he will say: "Same as yours. Don't ask me anymore." When she asks about other purchases, she gets the same answer.

-

With one exception. They are in a mattress shop. Bo Jin Yan wants to test and choose his own mattress. Because sleep is important for him.

The sales rep leads them to the mattress Jian Yao is after: "This is our best selling mattress. Would you like to lie down and test it out?"

Jian Yao lies down on the bed.

The sales rep continues to talk to Bo Jin Yan : "It's firm, made with fabric that's treated with anti bacterial properties..."

Bo Jin Yan: "Would it go out of shape if you bounce and roll on it a lot?"

The sales rep takes a look at him and Jian Yao, then with a sly smile on her face, she replies: "Sir, that's absolutely fine. This mattress is made with the best quality latex foam on the market."

She walks off, leaving just the two of them. Bo Jin Yan lies down beside Jian Yao.

Feeling the other side of the bed sinking in slightly, Jian Yao turns around and looks at him: "You do a lot of rolling in bed?"

"Of course not, only Chen Mo would roll on my bed."

It's been a long day. They both rest on the mattress.

As she is about to get up, Bo Jin Yan turns sideways, supporting his head with one of his hands. He looks into her eyes.

She heart starts to pound.

- It's because he is intruding into my personal space. She says to herself.

He leans towards her. His handsome features are more distinctive than usual because of they are just centimetres apart. His eyes look bright and he has a smile on his face. His thin lips moves: "Jian Yao moves in with me." He says softly with deep and rather sexy voice.

Jian Yao has never been so physically close to a man before. They are so close that she can feel his warm breath touching her skin.

After a short pause, Bo Jin Yan continues: "Clearly, if we live together, it will be a mutual beneficial arrangement. I am not interested in wasting my time on trivial matters in life, which you seem to enjoy. I

will have more time that I can devote to my work and other things I enjoy doing..."

"...Excuse me, are you satisfied with this mattress?" The sales rep is back.

Bo Jin Yan turns to look at the rep: "Please do not interrupt me." Then he continues with Jian Yao : " Indirectly, you will reap some benefits too... You can...."

"Sorry, I'm not interested." Jian Yao stops him.

Jian Yao gets off the bed and walks away with the sales rep. She is buying the mattress, to put in her own apartment. Bo Jin Yan stands at a distance and looks at her.

"Come on in." Jian Yao steps into the elevator.

Bo Jin Yan walks in and stands beside her.

"Why are you not interested?" He looks down at her.

Jian Yao does not answer. The elevator door opens. This level is a food court, a bunch of people flood in. As many people as possible squeeze into the elevator. Jian Yao is standing so close to Bo Jin Yan that their bodies seems to be touching each other's.

Jian Yao wants to step back, but there's no space. Then Bo Jin Yan looks down at her: "You haven't answered me. Why are you not interested to move in with me?"

— — — — —

The whole elevator is eavesdropping. He obviously doesn't care about the crowd.

Jian Yao speaks with a soft voice: "I like my own space. I need my peace and quiet time. I am not moving in. Case closed."

Bo Jin Yan does not insist anymore.

She is relieved. But after a few seconds, she hears him speak again: "You have made a wrong decision."

Finally, a young girl next to Jian Yao can't hold it in anymore. She bursts out laughing.

— —

Jian Yao knows that everyone in the elevator thinks Bo Jin Yan is her boyfriend, trying to persuade her to live with him. But she knows that it's the last thing on his mind. He's simply looking at the issue from an efficiency angle. His cohabitation proposal is not personal. So therefore, to decline his offer is an 'inefficient and wrong' decision.

Back in the apartment, Jian Yao is enjoying a warm relaxing bath in her bathtub. She thinks about Bo Jin Yan, his handsome looks, his smiles, and his proposal. Something feels different in her heart. She can't explain it, nor has she felt like that before in her life.

She gets ready for bed. She is still feeling a little out of sorts. The phone rings. It's Li.

He doesn't usually call at this time of the night. It must be important: "Is everything ok?"

Li Xun Ran sounds kind of vague: "Those numbers. We are able to put them in some sort of order, but they still don't make sense."

"What do you mean?"

"I've sent them to your email and to Professor Bo. Have a look yourselves."

-

Jian Yao puts on her coat and turns on the computer.

"145,297,289,121

162,17,324,1

25, 484,

365,88,729,16

421,27,841,1

586,29,1156,1

425,136,729,16 "

- What sort of game is Sun Yong trying to play here?

Jian Yao scrolls to the bottom of the message. The decipher specialist has boiled it down to this row of numbers : 8,9,9,13,14,15,19.

"We can't work out what this group of numbers might mean. They can be anything. Some sort of co-ordinates? words/page numbers in a book? Without any clues, it would take forever to solve. There's not much else we can do." Jian Yao recalls what Li Xun Ran tells her on the phone.

Jian Yao looks at the columns of numbers. She closes her computer and lies back onto the bed.

She takes out the phone, press those numbers. A landline number has eight digits. So there's three extra numbers. Switchboard extensions? No such luck. It's an empty number.

Morse code? She is not familiar with it. Latitude and longitude coordinates? But it's in the wrong format.

English alphabet? A to Z corresponding to 1-26. She takes up pen and paper from the bedside table and converts them into English alphabet. But she has her doubts. Can't be that easy. Even the experts cannot decipher them.

Translated letters: H, I, I, M, N ,O, S. Doesn't make any sense.

- Ok. What if we change the order

HIMINOS?

HNSOMII ?

.....

- Just go to bed. Jian Yao thinks to herself. Maybe Bo Jin Yan can work it out tomorrow.

She closes her eyes. Bo Jin Yan's face flash before her. The long slender eyes, tall nose, thin lips, his faint smile, the sarcastic smile...

She suddenly opens her eyes. She looks at those letters again.

Bo Jin Yan. Bo Jin Yan.

She has found the meaningful combination - HI, SIMON.

Chapter 17

Jian Yao knocks on the black colour front door. She thinks about the code that she has just cracked. Chills are going down her spine.

She's knocked on the door for a long time, but there's no answer.

"Tap.. Tap..." She persists.

She takes out her phone to call him.

Bo Jinyan answers in a tired voice: "Are you sleepwalking?
It's 1:00am in the morning."

Jian Yao: "Are you home? Open the door!"

Jian Yao waits outside his apartment for another five minutes before Bo Jinyan opens the door. He is wearing a bathrobe. His hair is still damp and with occasional drop of water forming at the tips and dripping down onto his bathrobe. The robe is 'open' around the neckline, revealing the top part of his chest.

He glances at her and smiles: "You can change your mind, with the proviso that you have to make me breakfast tomorrow morning."

Jian Yao: "I'm not" He walks inside the house.

Jian Yao has no choice but to follow behind him.

It's the first time she stepped in the house ever since he has moved into the apartment. Everything looks more or less like what she

remembers. Except... there is now a porcelain bathtub in the middle of the living room.

This bathtub is twice the size of the one in her apartment. The tub is filled, with steam rising into the air, which means Bo Jinyan just took a bath. Next to the tub, there's a little side table with a tall glass, filled with the flower tea Jian Yao recommended.

Bo Jinyan takes a seat on the sofa, one leg overlapping the other, underneath his big bathrobe. He looks at her: "Well, what makes you come to my house at this time of the night in your pyjamas..." His eyes slides over her face: "... like a frightened bird?"

Jian Yao sits across from him: "Li sent you an email on the numbers we found in Sun Yong's house."

Bo Jinyan takes out his silver notebook from beneath the coffee table.

After only a few seconds, he raises his hand to close the screen. He stands up. Jian Yao notices that his face has turned a little pale, with a sharp cold look in his eyes.

She says softly: "If you replace the numbers with alphabets"

Bo Jinyan turns and walks to a room.

Jian Yao follows behind.

-

Bo Jinyan's study. One side of the wall is a large bookcase, filled with boxes and boxes of file. It extends all the way to the ceiling.

Jian Yao watches Bo Jinyan reaches for one of the boxes on the top shelf. He places the box on his study table and starts to take out a few

folders. These folders are big and thick. On the side of each folder, there's a label that reads: 27-211, California , Flower Cannibal.

Bo Jinyan is scanning the documents in the file. Jian Yao asks: " Why would Sun Yong leave such a message?"

"It's not from him." Bo Jinyan says without looking, still scanning those documents: "He is a simple guy, he is incapable of coming up with such complex codes. And based on his personality, if he was to leave signals behind, they should be totems, or abstract symbols like knights and emblems."

Jian Yao is slightly surprised: " You mean Sun Yong is just a puppet? And there's someone else behind the instigation of his crime?" She looks at the folders on his study desk: "One of your cases in the US?"

Bo Jinyan shakes his head: "No. His mental condition can be hereditary, but it does not happen overnight. Sun Yong's abnormal behaviour was consistent with his troubled upbringing. Besides, his first murder happened while I was in America. Staying in Tung City is a last minute decision after I decided to come back to China, therefore his crime was not done to provoke me."

Jian Yao nods and looks at his stern face. He suddenly returned to China. Must be something to do with that serious illness of his.

Bo Jinyan continues: "Introverts prefer to work alone, and his crime displayed a distinctive personal character. There is no evidence to suggest that he has an accomplice." He looks at Jian Yao, "It's impossible that someone was controlling his actions all those times. "

"Sun Yong was solely responsible for the killing machine case. There is no doubt about it." Bo Jinyan concludes: "but someone went to the crime scene and left me this message."

Bo Jinyan has taken out a few photos from the files. Jian Yao takes a look at them. It's a caucasian in his 20s. In the photo, he is wearing a white T Shirt. He is an attractive man with blue eyes.

Suddenly Bo Jinyan speaks in a way that is very different from how he speaks normally:

"Hi, Simon. I am scared.

Hi, Simon. Come get me.

Hi, Simon. Will you be my dinner tonight?

He is imitating someone else. She looks at the pictures again: "Did he leave these signals for you? Has he come to China?"

- Is this the reason he left America? To return to China? The Flower Cannibal from California?

Bo Jinyan puts all the documents and the photos back into the box: "He is in Pelican Bay prison serving a life sentence. It's impossible for him to be here.."

Jian Yao knows there has to be a connection somewhere. Or else, Bo Jinyan would not have rushed in here and start going through the files.

"Then, who could it be?" Jian Yao asks.

"I don't know."

They both stand there for a while. Suddenly, he turns around and puts his hands on either side of her shoulders. He turns her around and starts pushing her gently towards the door.

"Bo Jinyan" Jian Yao knows he does not want to discuss any further, but she is concerned for him.

He pushes her all the way to the front entrance. He turns the knob of the front door and opens it. One more gentle push and she will be outside of his apartment.

Jian Yao turns to look at him.

He stands with a reassuring smile on his face. Then he looks straight into her eyes. His deep voice sounds like soothing water: ' Jian Yao. I am fine. Don't worry. Goodbye.' He gives her one final nudge.

Then he closes the door.

-

Jian Yao can't sleep. She tosses and turns for the rest of the night.

She knows it's pointless to knock on his door again. He will not answer.

The sun is out. Another morning.

She gets ready for work. Before she leaves the house, she gives Bo Jinyan a call. "Sorry, the number you dialled is currently switched off" She is greeted by a mechanical female voice.

Bo Jinyan never switches off his phone. This is probably more serious than she thinks.

She rushes downstairs. She knocks on his door: "Bo Jinyan! Bo Jinyan!" The banging sound and her voice echoes in the deserted stairway. No one answers.

--

Monday mornings are usually a frantic time for Jian Yao. There's a mountain of work piled on her desk. She has no choice but to put Bo Jinyan's matter aside.

During lunch break, she gives Fu Ziyu a call.

"He took the first flight back to the United States this morning." Fu Ziyu sounds concerned too.

Jian Yao: "What's the story with the Flower Cannibal?"

Fu Ziyu pauses. Then he explains: "Jian Yao, I don't think Bo Jinyan is certain who is behind the message. He has gone back to the US to talk to the FBI and possibly Ty, the Flower Cannibal. It's not something we can help with at this stage. But I believe in Bo Jinyan. He will be able to handle this. Don't worry. He will be back soon."

-

Fu Ziyu is right. There is nothing she can do.

After lunch, she returns to her desk. She looks around her office. Men and women dressed in business attire. Rows of computer, cubicles with desks and office chairs... busy, calm and ordinary. She wonders where Bo Jinyan is now. Who is he talking to. Criminals? Psychopaths? FBI agents who faces violence and death on a daily basis?

She and Bo Jinyan. They live in two different worlds.

-

A week has passed. Every evening after work, she will pass by Bo Jinyan's apartment. She presses her ears over the front door. It is always quiet. There's no one inside.

On Saturday night, while checking the inbox for new mail, she comes across Li's old message on the numbers.

She decides to send Bo Jinyan a message. The content is very brief:

- How's everything?

A few minutes later, a new email appears in the Inbox. It's Bo Jinyan.

- Fine. Take care of Chen Mo. The key is underneath the doormat.

Jian Yao smiles and immediately go downstairs.

She picks up the key that's hidden underneath the thick black mat. Even though this is a safe neighbourhood, but it's still a little risky to leave the key like that. Jian Yao decides to keep it until he returns.

The house has a slight musty smell, probably because it's been empty for a week. B City is notoriously bad for its quality of air. There's a thin layer of dust and ash on top of the furniture and window seals already. Jian Yao gives the place a quick clean. She finds Chen Mo underneath a pile of documents in the study. Jian Yao squats down, pats its shell and says: "He's overseas at the moment. Come home with me."

-

For the next two months, Jian Yao continues with her busy and uneventful life. Every morning, she has breakfast with Chen Mo, then it's off to work. She is usually exhausted by the time she gets home in the evening. A quick dinner, read a little, and it's bed time. In the weekend, she catches up with her classmates from the university. She will also spend a couple of hours cleaning Bo Jinyan's apartment for him.

During this time, she has lost a couple of kilos, and Chen Mo has gained 2 grams. She did some research on the net, For a turtle, it's considered a growth spurt! She can see how Bo Jinyan's calculations are very accurate. If she moves in with him, both him and Chen Mo will be very well looked after.

Sometimes, when she is cleaning his apartment, she will think of his handsome face. She will remember the day when they were testing mattress together, and she could feel her heart beating faster.

In her high school years, she had a crush on one of the seniors, a good looking, quiet boy who is mature for his age. She still remembers that feeling. Anxious, sweet, almost nauseating. She felt like she has butterflies in her stomach. When he was around her, she is excited but very shy at the same time.

But Bo Jinyan is different. He is dazzling and bright. She feels there's a big distance between him and her, who is just an ordinary girl. And he is supercilious and hard to get along with. She is usually very patient and tolerable, but in front of him, these virtues can vanish into the thin air. Also, he can be painfully naive sometimes.

Does she have a crush on him? Jian Yao is not so sure.

But she is sure that she wants him to be a part of her life. As a friend. At least.

The first of May is a public holiday - Labour day.

Fu Ziyu comes to B City to meet up with Jian Yao. He is bringing her out for a meal to thank her for cleaning Bo Jinyan's house and looking after Chen Mo.

"Rest assured, I will make Bo Jinyan pay for this meal." He says.

Jian Yao asks: "When is he coming back?"

"Nobody knows. He works alone. So he doesn't have to be accountable to anyone but himself. He seldom shares his plans and schedules with anybody."

-

Another fortnight has past.

As usual, she goes down to clean Bo Jinyan's apartment. It's close to lunchtime, so she arranges for the lunch order to be delivered to his house.

She had a big breakfast, so there's some leftover in the lunchbox. She leaves it on the table and continues with the cleaning.

It's a sunny afternoon. She put on her head phones and press play on her iPod, humming the melodies as she wipes the cabinet.

After a while, she thought she heard the sound of a door closing.

She takes her head phones off. She walks slowly into the lounge. The front door is closed. There's no one else there.

- Maybe it's the neighbours. She thought to herself.

After she tidies the study, she rinses the cloth in the bathroom. She passes by the kitchen and notices something is different ...on the table.

The chair is still nicely tucked underneath the table, the cutlery neatly placed to side...

Where's the half eaten food? The two chicken wings, the red bean mousse. They are gone?!

Jian Yao's heartbeat starts to accelerate. She is sure they are on the table. She looks to the right, where the trash bin is. There's an empty cup and a plate inside. Someone finished her food.

Jian Yao slowly turns around to look in the direction of his bedroom. She can see a vague image of a body moving on the reflections of the shiny floor boards.

No thief will finish off a half-eaten meal when he first enters a house.

So, either he was picky about the food served on the flight, or he is extremely hungry.

Jian Yao smiles to herself.

Chapter 18

Jian Yao leans on the wall that faces his bedroom door. She knocks gently on the wall.

It's been three months.

He looks much the same. He is sitting on his bed, working. When he hears the knock, he looks up and sees Jian Yao. He puts down the stack of documents in his hands and walks toward her.

Jian Yao is still wearing her apron and long rubber gloves. Her long hair casually tied back. There's even a bit of stain on her cheeks.

Bo Jinyan walks up close to her. She can smell the laundry scent from his clean, white shirt.

His eyes sparkles. With a shallow and arrogant smile, he speaks with the deep voice she has not heard in months: "Liar."

Jian Yao feels as if her heart has missed a beat. Her cheeks start to burn. But she calms herself down quickly.

- Remember, he held your hands just to let you lie down on the killing machine. There must be a 'non-romantic' reason for all his suggestive gestures.

So she asks: "What do you mean?"

Bo Jinyan answers proudly: "Obviously, you already treat this apartment like your home."

He comes back to see her cleaning the house, even having her lunch here. So he assumes she has finally 'come to her senses' and decides to move in with him.

Just as she is about to explain the whole situation, he points to the table: "Present. It's on the table."

Present?

Jian Yao walks over to the table. Next the stack of documents, there's a small rectangular box. It's blue in colour with a white ribbon around it.

She takes her gloves off and opens the box.

-

Jian Yao holds the box and walk out to the lounge. Bo Jinyan is sitting on the sofa drinking the flower tea.

She is quiet. So he speaks first: " So, do you like it?"

Jian Yao answers truthfully: "Yes, it's very nice." She looks inside of the box: A platinum necklace with a heart-shaped pendant, trimmed with diamonds. It's sparkling brightly under the lights.

"But" she did not get to finish her sentence, because Bo Jinyan suddenly takes out his mobile phone.

"Susan, she likes the gift. Goodbye." He tells the person on the other side, then puts the phone aside.

Jian Yao asks: "Who did you call?"

Bo Jinyan stands up from the sofa: "FBI Behavioural Analysis Unit Assistant. She chose the present. She insists that I call her after you receive the present. She wants to know what your reactions will be."

- So that's how the present came about. He asked his assistant to buy a present on his behalf. That person must have misunderstood her relationship with him. Therefore the present is an expensive heart-shaped diamond necklace.

Jian Yao gives the necklace back to him: "Thank you, but it's too expensive, and it's not necessary."

Bo Jinyan lifts his eye to look at her: "Just because the present is from me, you want me to be responsible for gift exchange too?"

Jian Yao: "....." That's not what I mean!

Bo Jinyan stands up: ". If there is a problem with the present, contact Susan directly. Here's her number. But do it later. We are meeting Fu Ziyu for dinner now."

— —

Fu Ziyu is waiting in the restaurant. He sees the two of them walk through the entrance. He gives a them little wave.

They walk over, Fu Ziyu puts out the cigarette that's in his hand. He gives Bo Jinyan a hug.

"Welcome back." Fu Ziyu says softly.

After the hug, Fu Ziyu goes back to his seat.

Bo Jinyan remains standing. He looks pensive. Suddenly, he takes a big step, his tall body approaching Jian Yao. Before she can react, he bows his head, stretches out his arms to wrap her tightly in his arms.

"Thump, thump" Jian Yao can hear her own racing heartbeat.

Compared to him, she is petite. She sees a big patch of white colour in front of her. It's his shirt. A side of her face rests on his chest.

"What..?" Jian Yao asked softly.

He loosens his grip and says lightly: "I forgot to hug you earlier."

Jian Yao: "..... Thank you."

Jian Yao looks up and sees a funny expression on Fu Ziyu's face.

She gives him a shrug. - Calm down. It's Bo Jinyan. Don't read into it.

-

Fu Ziyu is responsible for ordering the food. He orders a mix of meat and fish dishes. Bo Jinyan doesn't seem to mind. Jian Yao takes note. Oh, so it's ok to have dishes with red meat when she is dining with him in the future. Even though he won't touch it, he doesn't mind seeing them there.

She really wants to know what happened when Bo Jinyan was in US, But Jian Yao is not sure if she should ask. But she doesn't need to, because Fu Ziyu brings up the topic: "Have you found the guy?"

Bo Jinyan shakes his head.

Jian Yao is sipping the soup, quietly listening.

Fu Ziyu asks: "Will you be going to US to assist with the investigation, or stay in China to try and find him??"

He answers: "Unfortunately, I will not participate in the investigation of this case."

Fu Ziyu thinks for a second and says: "Because of your identity?"

"Yeah..." ..

Jian Yao looks at Fu Ziyu. Puzzled. Fu Ziyu explains the situation to her.

Bo Jinyan assisted the FBI in the past because of his affiliations with Maryland University. Now that he is no longer a professor there, and the fact that he accepted the post of the consultant for the Ministry of Public Security in China, the FBI feels it is inappropriate to include him in their investigations because it's a matter of national security.

Jian Yao looks at Bo Jinyan and frowns: "But this guy is coming after you. How can they cut you out of the investigation loop?"

Bo Jinyan looks at her: "Oh, they will not 'cut me out of the loop'. The Chinese officials negotiated with the FBI on my behalf. After a month of discussion, the two countries have reached an agreement. I will assist in certain aspects of the operation... as the victim."

Fu Ziyu asks: "Then, how are they going to approach this case?"

"The FBI will send a team over here. Their investigation will, of course, be done under the supervision of the authorities. If necessary, the Chinese police will assist. The Municipal Public Security Bureau will be responsible for victim protection, i.e., protecting me. "

Fu Ziyu asks another question: "Will your phone, e-mail, as well as resident be monitored?" ,

Bo Jinyan answers arrogantly: "Do you think I will agree to that?"

Jian Yao takes a look at him. It must be very frustrating. To be excluded in an operation when the criminal is obviously provoking him.

-

By the time they return to the apartment, it's past 8pm.

It is a bright star-studded night. The cool breeze seems to blow away the stress and worries and relaxes those who are walking on the street.

Jian Yao and Bo Jinyan are standing outside his apartment. Jian Yao asks: "Do you want to see Chen Mo?"

Bo Jinyan nods, and add a dry joke: "I hope he is still alive."

Jian Yao: "..... he is doing fine."

Once they enter the house, they see Chen Mo clawing toward the entrance. Bo Jinyan walks over and puts him on his palm: "He's put on weight." ,

- Such a tiny difference. 2 grams. Can he actually feel it?

Bo Jinyan then turns around and looks at her: "Let's go."

Jian Yao wonders: "Where?"

Bo Jinyan raises an eyebrow: "Downstairs, to sleep. "Do you not intend to move in with me? Chen Mo can stay here. He seems to have adapted to this new environment very well. It's the first time he's gained weight in 10 years."

- Ah. Liar... She remembers his words from this morning.

Jian Yao reaches her hands out towards him.

His wrist is grabbed. The itchy feeling... is here again.

Jian Yao starts walking, pulling him along. When she reaches the first door, she turns the knob and opens the door. Then she walks behind him and push him outside, just like how he treated her three months ago.

Bo Jinyan quietly turns to look at her.

"Goodbye Bo Jinyan. No, I am not moving in with you."

She smiles, and closes the door in front of his face.

She turns and walks to the sofa. But after a few steps, she turns back and looks through the peephole. Bo Jinyan is still standing outside. He seems to be pondering. After a while, without any expression on his face, he heads to the elevator. Soon the door opens and he walks in.

Jian Yao walks to the bed. She lies down, takes out the necklace from the box. She watches it sparkles in the light.

-

Three days after Bo Jinyan has returned from US, Jian Yao receives a transfer notice from her manager. She is being transferred to the Customer 3 division.

Customer 3 is one of the largest division within the Sales Department. They generate a lot more revenue than the small department she is currently working in. Jian Yao's new role is the business assistant, which is responsible for odd jobs, administration and logistic, secretarial matters. Actually, even a college graduate will be qualified for the position. Jian Yao does not understand why she is transferred here.

Jian Yao asks her manager what is the reason for the transfer. The manager smiles apologetically: " The previous assistant of Customer 3 division died from a sudden illness last month, and they are not able to find a replacement yet. Within all the new interns, your performance is the most outstanding. Therefore, head office has decided to transfer you to their team. They are an important division within the department. If you do well there, it will help your career progress."

-

The automotive parts division goes for lunch together. It's the farewell meal for Jian Yao.

The manager is not there, so everyone is more relaxed. Because Jian Yao is going to Customer 3 division, the topic of conversation naturally falls on the gossips and stories from that division.

A young girl starts: "Apparently, they are getting a new director. I went pass the Board office yesterday to collect some documents, and I saw the chairman of the board personally sending him off."

Everyone has heard rumours, but no one knows who this new director is. They begin to ask questions. Jian Yao is quietly listening. After all, the information might be useful for her new post.

The girl shakes her head: "How would I know... but -!" She laughs: "the director looks very handsome. Tall and handsome."

Everybody laughs. Someone says: "Maybe that's the fiancé of the Chairman, not the director"

Jian Yao has only seen the photo of the Chairman in promotional materials. Yin Ziqi, daughter of the former chairman. She is 29 years old. Has a fiancé. A rich young man who is the heir to a large multinational corporation.

The girl thinks for a moment: "Mmm... Don't think so. Chairman's fiancé is supposed to be a smooth talking charmer. This new director looks kind of ...vain."

Someone adds quickly: "Don't scare Jian Yao. That's her future boss!"

— —

After lunch, Jian Yao packs up and reports to her new division.

As she steps into the office, she can see the difference between a core and marginal division. It's a much bigger office. Even the staff's office desks are much bigger than those in her division. In her previous office, only the manager has a desk this size.

Most desks are empty, There's two people in the whole office.

Jian Yao walks over: "Hello, I am Assistant Jian Yao, starting work in Customer 3 division today."

One man and a lady turns around to look at her.

Her female colleague is in her late 20s, with wavy hair and big eyes. She dresses quite casually, in a bohemian style dress. There's a black jacket hanging on back of her chair.

She nods to Jian Yao and introduces herself: "Hi. I am Dan Shen Wei, Sales Manager." Then she turns to the young man next to her: "Pei Ze, take care of her." Then she goes back to work.

Pei Ze looks a couple of years younger than Dan Shen Wei. He's wearing a straight black suit. He has a baby face with a charming smile. He stands up to greet Jian Yao: "Hi, I am Pei Ze. I am also one of the Sales Manager. Don't mind Dan Shen Wei... Takes time for her to warm up to new people..."

Shen Dan Wei gives him a friendly swears without looking up: "Fxxx you, Pei Ze."

- They seem pleasant enough to work with. Jian Yao has a good first impression of her new colleagues.

Pei Ze continues: "The others have gone for a meeting, to meet our new director. The two of us are working on an urgent proposal so we stayed behind. You will meet the rest of the team soon."

Jian Yao nods.

(something extra) - story behind the gift

Bo Jinyan is on the phone with Fu Ziyu. "She cleans your apartment every weekend. She is so nice. I want to move in with her too."

After he puts down the phone, he remembers the fishing rod he gave her as a thank you present for the fish. He remembers Fu Ziyu words. Show appreciation.

Does it mean he should get her a gift this time too?

Even though he's been excluded from the investigation, he still has some authority within the organisation.

He calls the department assistant: "Help me to buy a gift."

Susan: "Well, who is it for?"

"A girl."

- This is interesting. Professor Bo has never bought any woman a gift.

Carefully, she asks: "Is it for a young girl?"

"Yes."

- Oh my god! A girlfriend? Susan takes the opportunity to ask further: "What stage of the relationship are the two of you in?"

Bo Jinyan raises his head. He thinks about it and replies: "She is my assistant. We will be living together very soon."

Susan is stunned. This is incredible news. It's a well known fact that Bo Jinyan is an 'iceberg'. He's never had a girl friend. There's a rumour that he's still a virgin at the age of 26. Well, he's finally...

Susan says timidly: "But... such an important gift... you should choose it yourself."

Bo Jinyan growls at her: "What makes you think I have time to waste on something so trivial? Just buy something. Anything. "

Susan: "..."

Chapter 19

Pei Ze: "Jian Yao, briefing in five minutes. Conference Room."

"Thank you." Jian Yao gives Pei Ze a smile. She makes a quick trip to the rest room.

In front of the mirror, she makes sure she looks presentable. She takes out her lipsticks and does a quick touch up. Her clothes look straight and not wrinkled. Good. She takes a deep breathe and straightens her back. She gives herself a 'Bo Jinyan' type haughty professional smile.

Very good. Perfect. Looks dignified.

- Okay. I am ready. She walks out in her heels, and heads to the conference room.

There are five people sitting around the large oval table. Pei Ze and Dan Shen Wei are already there. There are another three men whom she has not met before .

Jian Yao finds an empty seat. Before she sits down, she gives a small bow: "Hello everyone I'm Jian Yao. I am the new Assistant." Jian Yao smiles toward the crowd.

The man sitting beside her is the first to stand up to shake her hand: "'Hi I am Zhou Qin." He is in his mid thirties. He looks average, but he has a pair of sharp eyes and a contagious smile. He looks like an experienced sales person.

The other two men also stand up. One of them is called Qian Yu Wen, in his early thirties, medium height, slim build, with dark skin. He has a stern look on his face. He gives Jian Yao a firm handshake. The other man is Mai Chen. He is a cute young man around the same age as Jian Yao. He smiles gently to her: "Welcome to the team."

All pleasantries are over. Pei Ze walks to stand behind Jian Yao. He rests his hands on the back rest of her chair and leans down: " 'Lau Zhou' and 'Lau Qian' are the senior sales manager. 'Xiao Mai' is the Operations Assistant. Like your previous division, we work together as a team, so communication is very important."

(Note from TB: You probably know this. But just in case - In China, colleagues and friends often don't call people's full name. Instead, they would use "Lau" (usually when it's an older man) or "Xiao" (when the person is younger than you) plus their last name. i.e. Mai Chen is "Xiao Chen" and Zhou Qin is "Lau Zhou".)

Jian Yao thanks him. Pei Ze replies: "It's my pleasure to work with a pretty girl like you." Then he returns to his seat. Others laugh, with the exception of Shen Dan Wei. She is looking down at her notebook.

Everyone is seated, The room becomes quiet. They wait.

Jian Yao thinks to herself. She has met everyone in the division except for the Department manager Lin Yu Xuan and the mysterious new director.

A woman around thirty years old walks in, It's Lin Yu Xuan. You can tell that she is a career woman, dressed in a ladies suit. Her eyes rest on Jian Yao: "Jian Yao?"

Jian Yao stands up immediately: "Yes. Nice to meet you, Manager Lin."

Lin Yu Xuan smiles, she answers politely: "Mmm..."

Pei Ze smiles and asks "Manager Lin, who is our new director?"

Lin Yu Xuan replies: "He's on his way here. He was just talking to the Chairman." She turns and looks down the corridor : "Ah, here he is."

Everyone stands.

Through the frosted glass panels, they see a tall figure walking leisurely towards the entrance.

The moment he enters, Pei Ze gets everyone to clap and welcome him.

Then Jian Yao sees the same handsome face that lives just downstairs from her.

Everyone has a big smile on their face. Only Jian Yao looks stunned.

Jian Yao now understands the 'vain' comment made by the young girl during her farewell lunch.

- Can someone tell her why Bo Jinyan is here?

Manager Lin introduces: "This is Bo Jinyan, our new director. We are honoured to have him join the team. I'm sure our division will go from strength to strength under his leadership."

Everybody applauds again. Even the grim beauty Dan Shen Wei seems to like this new director. She has a look of approval in her eyes. Jian Yao fixes her eyes on Bo Jinyan, but he looks pass her as if he does not recognise her. ,

Just this morning they were having breakfast together. He didn't even give the slightest hint that he will be here.

Everyone takes a seat. Each employee makes a brief self introduction to the new director.

When everyone has finished, Manager Lin says: "Director Bo will be responsible for the overall strategic and business direction. From now on, all of you will report directly to me. The Chairman does not want Director Bo to be bogged down with the routine tasks."

Everybody nods. Jian Yao is suspicious. Business direction? It's not his expertise.

Manager Lin asks: "Director Bo, would you like to say a few words?"

"Alright." Bo Jinyan says. He takes a pause and looks around the table slowly. The place is so quiet that you can hear a pin fall to the ground.

He starts to speak: "I don't like beating around the bush. I am only going to be here temporarily. You do not have to befriend me. I have no energy to deal with each one of you separately. I have my way of doing things. You have to respond to my every demand, but I will not respond to yours. We will live in peace. And at appraisal time, you will all get an A for performance from me. Thank you."

The room is quiet again.

- Temporary? What is he trying to achieve here?

The Customer 3 division is an elite team. They never expected to have to deal with someone who is so brutally blunt. But after a moment to take in Bo Jinyan's speech, they applaud in unison.

Manager Lin is still slightly taken back by his speech, To smooth things over, she speaks with a calm voice: "Director Bo, since we have not been able to recruit a secretary yet, Jian Yao, our new assistant will serve you until we find someone else."

An indifferent looking Bo Jinyan: "That's fine."

Manager Lin looks to Jian Yao: "From now on, you report directly to Director Bo."

-

Meeting has ended. They return to their office.

The table for the Director's secretary is located outside his office. She sits down and see Bo Jinyan walking towards her.

People are watching. Jian Yao keeps an expressionless face.

He walks past the table, taps the side with his fingers: "You. Come in." And he goes into an oversized office.

Jian Yao takes a notebook and pen and walks in after him. She hesitates, then decides to shut the door behind her. .

The crowd outside is finally able to relax.

All the company chairs have castors on them. While sitting in his chair, Pei Ze glides over to Shen Dan Wei's desk. He takes a glance at the Director's office: "The poor little beauty. Where did this arrogant guy come from? "

Shen Dan Wei replies: "Really? I think he's cool."

Pei Ze looks at her and laughs out loud. He looks up, surprised to find that Qian Yu Wen looking at him quietly. Pei Ze looks away, starts whistling, and glides back to his desk, Everyone goes back to work.

-

Bo Jinyan is sitting at an expensive black solid work desk. He sits in the leather chair and stares at the computer screen.

Jian Yao walks to the table. She throws the note book and pen on his desk: "Explain!"

Behind the screen, Bo Jinyan mumbles: "Your inescapable fate as my assistant"

Jian Yao: "BO Jinyan!"

Suddenly, a light knock at the door.

"Come in." Bo Jinyan lifts his eyes to glance at her. A smile has appeared on her previous angry face like magic.

It's Mai Chen. He has two security guards with him, carrying some office furniture. Bo Jinyan smiles. One of the guys asks: "Where do you want us to put them?"

Bo Jinyan puts his hands behind head, like he is resting on a pillow, and casually answers: " Anywhere, as long as it's somewhere within my range of vision."

— —

Jian Yao looks at him. "Don't tell me you are here for some undercover operation. You disguised as a director and transferred me here so I can work for you?"

Bo Jinyan: "I'm glad to see you are using your brain."

She can't believe this.

“Bo Jinyan, how can you do this to me?” she asks: “You should at least check with me first to see if I am willing to help you?”

Bo Jinyan’s smile freezes.

Jian Yao continues: “Do you know how much I value my job? This is an area of work I want to pursue in. You don’t like other people to intervene with your investigations. I am the same. I want a stable and safe job. But what will become of me in the future? You would have left the company but I am still going to work here. How will my colleague treat me? What would they think of me “O be careful. Don’t talk to her. She’s a spy” Or if the next time you need to solve a case in Mongolia, you expect me to quit my job and follow you there?”

Her face is getting more and more red. She’s only been here for a few months. She has worked hard to settle into the company. But Bo Jinyan is going to ruin all that. He has no right to dictate what she will be doing.

She walks to the door, and suddenly remembers, her desk has been moved inside his office. She has nowhere else to go. She sits down at her desk and turns her back to Bo Jinyan.

After a while, she has calmed herself down. She begins to think.

- What am I going to do now? Should I resign? But where will I go from here?

Clearly the Chairman and Manager Lin knows Bo Jinyan’s identity. Perhaps after she solves this case, they can help cover for her, so no one else in the company will know. She will return to her original post.

At this point, someone knocks on the door. The tapping goes on for a while. Bo Jinyan just keeps silent. Jian Yao clears her voice: "Please come in."

Pei Ze pushes open the door. His hand is carrying two coffee cups. He gives a charming smile: "A mocha and a herbal tea. Is that ok?"

Jian Yao smiles and stands up: "Thank you so much. How much is it?"

Pei Ze laughs: "Don't mention it. My pleasure." He turns to Bo Jinyan: "Bye."

Bo Jinyan really is a man of his word. He ignores Pei Ze.

Pei Ze closes the door. Jian Yao puts down the cups on her table.

Bo Jinyan: "Mocha, thank you."

"Come and get it yourself!"

Soon, she hears him standing up and walking towards her. She keeps her head down. He says in a sooth gentle voice: "your job will not be too affected by this case. I will solve it very quickly. Think about it. A case as complicated as the killer machine only took me 5 days to crack. This is a piece of cake."

Jian Yao feels a little more reassured, but she keeps quiet.

A pair of hands appear on either ends of the table. The amber cufflinks on his sleeves reflects the light from the table lamp. He leans forward. His face is just inches away from hers.

"Sorry for being blunt, but what is the purpose of your job? Taking some goods from one location, transfer them to a different location and sell them at a higher price. Is that what you will tell your grandchildren when you are old? How much cargo you helped transferred in your lifetime? Or do you want them to know how many lives you have saved?"

Jian Yao looks at him. The two faces are separated by less than 30cm, she can almost see her own reflection in his eyes.

Somewhere in her heart, a chord is struck lightly.

Jian Yao turns her face away.

"Nonsense." She says: "It's logistics, economic development, an indispensable part of keeping the society prosperous."

Bo Jinyan loosens his grip off the corners of the tables. He walks back to his desk, taking his cup of mocha with him. He takes a few pieces of paper from there and walks back to her desk: "Okay, Miss logistics, can we have a look at the information on the case now?" He puts the pieces of paper on her desk.

She opens the files. There's a photo of a young lady, wearing a suit, in her early twenties. She looks at the next document. It's her CV. Wang Wan Wei, aged 23, Assistant of Customer 3 Division. Her predecessor.

Bo Jinyan makes a comment: "You and her. The two of you look alike. You are both pale and thin."

Jian Yao ignores him. He continues: "It's not death from natural causes. It's suicide."

- Jian Yao thought Bo Jinyan only deals with cases involving vicious serial killer. The death of a white collar office lady? This is not the type of case he would usually take on.

She asks: "Is she an agent from the Ministry of Public Security?"
What's so special about her?

Bo Jinyan: "Do you think the Ministry has nothing better to do than to send their agents as porters, I am sorry, logistic workers?"

Jian Yao: ".....So, what's the reason...?"

She is confused. Bo Jinyan's phone rings: "Ah well.." He takes a look at Jian Yao: "She'll eat anything. Bye."

He hangs up. He says to Jian Yao: "We are going for dinner."

Jian Yao asks: "With Whom?"

Bo Jinyan: "A woman that brings me nothing but trouble. Why else do you think I would accept this 'kindergarten level' case?"

Jian Yao is curious.

- Woman?

.....Chairman Yin?

Chapter 20

They walk pass a European design screen with white floral cravings. A beautiful crystal chandelier hangs from the ceiling in the middle of the lounge. The large lounge is furnished with expensive but tasteful furniture. An elegant lady sits at a small round table in the middle of the lounge.

Yin Ziqi is wearing a red strapless dress. Beautiful, sexy, yet seems unapproachable and not very easy to get along with. But when she sees Bo Jinyan, she embraces her femininity. She glances at him obliquely: "Finally, you are willing have a meal with me."

Bo Jinyan pulls out a chair and sits down. He tells Jian Yao: "Take a seat."

Yin Ziqi stands up, shakes hands with Jian Yao and smiles: "Nice to meet you."

Jian Yao responds with a smile: "Hello, chairman Yin, I am Jian Yao."

The three of them sit down.

Yin Ziqi looks at Bo Jinyan: "I thought your assistant will be an arrogant eccentric weirdo like you."

Jian Yao smiles: "I certainly am not."

Bo Jinyan glances at Yin Ziqi, and says in a sarcastic tone: "Is this how you see me?"

Bo Jinyan suddenly thinks of something. He turns to look at Jian Yao: "Is this how you see me too?"

Jian Yao answers softly: "Well, who transferred me to a different division without consulting me first?"

Yin Ziqi is surprised to see how they relate to each other. She tells Jian Yao: "Miss Jian, I need Jinyan to help me with an investigation within the company. He insisted that only if you can be his assistant, will he then accept the case, therefore I have no choice but to authorise the transfer."

- Insisted that she works with him before he would accept?

Jian Yao is secretly pleased.

Yin Ziqi said: "But I thought he would consult you first. I had no idea that he didn't speak to you beforehand..."

Bo Jinyan interrupts her: "We have come to an agreement. Now let's get back to business."

Yin Ziqi laughs. She says to Jian Yao: "Let me formally introduce myself. I am Ziqi, Jinyan's sister."

Jian Yao has a suspicion that they are related, but she never thought they are brothers and sisters, because Bo Jinyan never mentioned he has a sibling. As if aware of her doubts, Yin Ziqi smiles: "Actually, I am his step sister. Jinyan's father married my mother. Not a lot of people know about this. We grew up in America together."

-

Before dinner is served, Yin Ziqi talks about the case.

"The police have confirmed that Wang Wan Wei's death is a suicide. However, I still want to clarify a few things:

1. She mentioned in the suicide note that she chose to end her life because she was overwhelmed by pressure. I do not know if this pressure is work related. If so, I need to know more about it and whether the management style in Customer 3 division was part of the cause. I would like to know the specific reasons for her suicide.

2. Her cause of death is drug overdose. I do not want to make this fact public because I have heard a lot of rumours about staff in our company taking drugs. I want to know if anyone else in the division takes drugs as well. I am afraid there is a secret drug network within the company.

Jian Yao did not expect to hear this. Her impression of the company is a clean one. Bo Jinyan just summarises the requests: "Investigate cause of suicide and find out if company has a drug network. Sounds like freshman criminology introductory exercises. "

Yin Ziqi says: "Come on, Jinyan. You have shares in this company too. Uncle Bo and mom took years to build this company. Do it for their sake."

Bo Jinyan looks at Jian Yao: "Never mind, we have Jian Yao. Good practice for her since she is still in the elementary levels of criminology."

Jian Yao ignores his scoffing comments: "Chairman Yin, we will do our best."

Yin Ziqi nods: "let's take a break from work. I hope you will enjoy the food tonight..."

She signals the waiter to serve the courses.

-

Appetiser is salad. She ordered steak as main course for herself and Jian Yao, and fried cod for Bo Jinyan. Like an elder sister, she reminds her brother: "Don't just eat the fish, eat some vegetables too."

Bo Jinyan: "I am not a kid anymore." But then, he picks up some salad from the bowl.

The portions are quite big. Jian Yao cannot finish her salad. Bo Jinyan takes a look starts eating her remaining salad. Yin Ziqi give Jian Yao a

strange look. Jian Yao glances at her food. There's also leftover salad on Yin Ziqi's bowl but Bo Jinyan is only eating from her bowl.

-

Bo Jinyan is the last to finish eating. He wipes his mouth with a napkin and turns to Yin Ziqi. Both of the ladies thought he is going to talk about his views toward the case or strategies he will be employing, but instead, he asks his sister to keep Jian Yao's involvement with the case a secret, so that she can go back to her little assistant role in the automotive parts division after the investigations are finished.

-

They are driving home. She is pleased that he talked to his sisters about her concerns.

Jian Yao: "You get on well with your sister."

Bo Jinyan: "Really? I don't feel that way."

Jian Yao looks at him. If it's not because he loves her sister, would he take on such an entry-level case?

As if he can read her mind, he says: "If it was you who committed suicide, I will take on the investigation too."

Jian Yao: ".....Gee...should I say thank you?"

- Come on... no one uses this sort of analogy to express how important the person is to them.

— —

They return to Bo Jinyan's house together to study the information on the case.

Wang Wan Wei, from H province. Attended University in B City. Graduated with average grades. Single. Comes from an ordinary family. Parents are divorced. She is raised up by her mom who owns a tailor shop. Not wealthy.

Last month, the team went on a retreat together. Wang injected too much drug into herself. Her body was found the next morning, by her colleagues. There is also a suicide note in her room. It's not a suspicious death.

Information pack also contained the resort they went for the retreat, photos of her body in the room, her personal items such as clothes, jewellery, etc, confessions of her colleagues.

Jian Yao picks up a copy of the suicide note.

"Mom:

When you see this letter, I have left this world. I am sorry, I can not look after you anymore. I am a timid girl, always disappoints you. I can not give you the life you are after. I choose to leave now. Please believe I am going to a better place. Don't be sad. Everyone will die sometime, right? it's only a matter of timing. I am just choosing to end it earlier.

I used to think that the future is bright. I thought if I worked hard enough, I could get you a little place of your own. But I was wrong. No matter how hard I try, I am not as clever as others, I am not as eloquent as others. I am bad at my job. I am like a defeated and disgraced soldier, putting on a fake smile every day, hiding in my little shell, falling into a bottomless pit.

I do not even know when it started, but my life has become so dark, so dirty, so desperate. I look in the mirror in the morning and I don't recognise myself. I am ashamed to see you, I have avoided home for a

year. I am not afraid that you will scold me. But I don't want you to be sad.

Mom, I've made a lot of mistakes, taken many wrong steps. It's too late to turn back. I cannot look back, I just have to end it.

Mom, there's still twenty thousand dollars in my bank account. The password is the birth year of you, dad and me. I am sorry, mom.

Mom, do not be sad. This is a release for me. I can not change or resist my fate, but at least I can choose to end my life, to end it in my own hands.

Goodbye, Mom. Do not be sad, tomorrow is a new day.

Daughters Wang Wan Wei
xx, x, x Day "

Jian Yao puts down the suicide note, Tears comes to her eyes.

She clears her throat and tells Bo Jinyan: "I have read all the information."

Bo Jinyan on the other hand, does not seem to be affected in the slightest.

"My assistant cannot be so sentimental. Can you switch back to normal mode now?"

Jian Yao replies: "Women are sentimental. Why don't you go find a man? This man needs to be good at fishing, will clean your house, take care of Chen Mo, and not mind how picky you are."

Bo Jinyan keeps silent this time.

Jian Yao calms down. She asks: Bo Jinyan "Is it because of this note that the police concluded that it's a suicide?"

Bo Jinyan: "Based on a note alone is not enough evidence to conclude it's a suicide, because to fake a note is not difficult. They just need to put themselves in the shoes of the victim, think about what bothers them in life and write the note based on those fears and frustrations."

Bo Jinyan sighs: "I hate to answer simple question like these. It's boring."

Jian Yao: "Just say it!"

Bo Jinyan closes his eyes and starts to share his analysis on the case:

"This is indeed a suicide note that Wang wrote.

Firstly, there's the absence of duress in her note. She was not stressed when she was writing. Because the writing was fluent. You can tell it from the strokes of her handwriting.

In addition to this, she used a lot of abstract suicide metaphor, defeated, shell, bottomless pit; there are many repeat statements such as 'Mom, do not be sad'; some phrases does not make much sense, for example, 'my life became dark, dirty' ..People faking notes tend to be more clear, cohesive, concise, straight to the point, as to avoid loopholes. This is a real testament."

Jian Yao reads the suicide note again: "Your analysis is very thorough."

Bo Jinyan's eyes flashed a smile.

Jian Yao asks: "What should we do now?"

Bo Jinyan replies: "We need to start with the reasons for the suicide. If there is drug network, it will naturally surface..."

Jian Yao: "But where do we start?"

Bo Jinyan asks her: "What are the most common reasons for woman to commit suicide?"

Jian Yao thinks for a while: "work stress, relationship problems, economic pressure, physical illness"

"Great." He says, "I will leave it to you to decide what ones fit this case."

"Then I will start with detailed background check on Wang Wan Wei." Jian Yao said.

(extra story) - Bo Jinyan's zero love history

Once, Jian Yao asks Fu Ziyu: "Not a single girlfriend in 26 years?"

Even though his character is a little arrogant, a little overbearing, a little difficult to get along but the overall package is still very attractive. It's hard to believe there's no woman attracted by him.

Fu Ziyu answers: "Miss, have you considered his age?"

"Age?"

"Ah, He went to university when he was 14, graduated when he was 17, gained his PhD when he was 21, This means he's always around women that's a lot older than him."

Jian Yao: Oh.....

Fu Ziyu : "He won't go for woman that's older than him."

Jian Yao: "Why?"

His comment is strictly an intuitive one. He has never thought about why.

Jian Yao thinks for a while: "I think I know why. Because the EQ gap is too big. Girls mature faster than guys generally. So in his case, the gap is even bigger."

Fu Ziyu laughs : "Spot on. You've nailed it."

They are still laughing when Bo Jinyan enters the room.

Bo Jinyan: "What are you guys talking about?"

Fu Ziyu says: "Your past."

Bo Jinyan raises his eyebrow - his past ah

He looks at Jian Yao with a smile.

She is interested in his past... ah...